

Stepping Into the Oklahoma Land Run

Skills: Physical Activity, Social Studies, Math

Objective: Students will measure an area to represent Oklahoma's first land run and convert distances to a map of the historic area.

Background

During the 1800s, the US government relocated Indian tribes from all over the country into the area known as Oklahoma Territory.

Beginning in 1879, newspapers throughout the West began urging the government to open part of that territory for homesteading by non-Indian land seekers. The Unassigned Lands, left vacant in the post-Civil War effort to create reservations for Plains Indians and other tribes, were considered some of the best unoccupied public land in the nation.

Homeseekers known as "Boomers" gathered at the Kansas border and made many attempts to colonize this tract, but the federal government removed them. They returned in increasing numbers. Cattlemen came in without legal sanction, divided the range, built fences and corrals, and grazed their cattle over the prairies. In 1886-87, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was built across the region, and stations were established along its right of way.

On March 2, 1889, President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed the two-million-acre region open for settlement. It included all or part of present-day Canadian, Cleveland, Kingfisher, Logan, Oklahoma, and Payne Counties. Under the provisions of the Homestead Act of 1862, a legal settler could claim 160 acres of public land, and those who lived on and improved the claim for five years could receive title.

In the spring of 1889 the largest accumulations of would-be settlers massed in camps at the Kansas border towns, mainly at the railroad towns of Arkansas City and Caldwell. With people being restrained there by U.S. troops, the Boomer camps grew larger and larger. On the south, long lines of white-sailed wagons wound their way up from Texas directly to the south line of the Unassigned Lands at Purcell in the Chickasaw Nation. From that point many of the settlers moved northward up the eastern line and along the South Canadian River that formed the southern boundary of the target area. On the west, clusters of drought-stricken families from the Texas Panhandle and No Man's Land flooded to the boundary near Fort Reno and west of Kingfisher stage station.

On April 22, 1889, the Unassigned Lands were opened to settlement. As the hour for the opening approached, great crowds waited on the borders, while mounted soldiers stood on guard to turn back intruders. At noon bugles

P.A.S.S.

Grade 4

Physical Education—4.3;
5.1,2; 7.1,2,3

Social Studies—1.1,2,3;
2.1,2; 4.2,5; 5.1,2

Math Process—1.1,2,3;
2.3; 3.2; 4.4; 5.2

Math—3.2b; 4.4ab

Grade 5

Physical Education—4.1;
5.1,2,3,5; 7.1,2,3,4

Health and Safety—1.2;
6.1,2,3

Social Studies—2.2; 6.3;
7.1,4

Math Process—1.1,2,3;
2.3; 3.2; 4.4; 5.2

Math—2.3; 4.2,4; 5.1d

Grade 6

Physical Education—
5.2,3; 6.1,2

Health and Safety—1.2;
6.1,2,3

Social Studies—1.2,3;
2.1,2,3

Math Process—1.1,3,6;
2.1; 4.1,2; 5.2,4

Math—4.3

Materials

crayons or markers

yard sticks or other measuring tools

chalk, flour, paint or other acceptable material for marking an area outdoors

Oklahoma road map

sounded, then guns were fired all along the border as a signal that the land was open. Men raced in on horseback, on foot, in covered wagons, and hanging onto every available hold on slowly moving trains. When a homeseeker found a tract he liked, he drove a stake as evidence of possession and held it as best he could.

Tents appeared everywhere. By the end of the day, Oklahoma City was a city of about 10,000 tent and wagon dwellers, and other cities—Kingfisher, El Reno, Norman, Guthrie, and Stillwater—had sprouted on the prairie.

Some children set up their own businesses outside the land office, selling creek water for 5 cents a cup to homesteaders who were waiting to file their claims. Other children gathered buffalo chips to provide fuel for their mothers' cooking fires.

Schools opened in tents the following week. Most were taught by volunteers who were paid by the pupils' parents until the cities and counties could establish regular school districts. Part of the land in each township had been reserved by law for school use.

Within a month, Oklahoma City had five banks and six newspapers. Hotels were opened, and by summer, greengrocers were doing a thriving business. In Oklahoma City, fresh tomatoes sold for 15 cents a bushel, eggs at 3 cents a dozen, and home-churned butter for 6 cents a pound.

Social Studies

1. Read and discuss the background material.
2. Provide students with copies of the attached map of Oklahoma counties and have them color in Canadian, Cleveland, Kingfisher, Logan, Oklahoma, and Payne Counties. Now have students look at the outline of the Unassigned lands. Which parts of the counties colored in do not fit the outline?
3. Based on what students find in Math Activity 1, lead a discussion based on the following questions:
 - In which county would you have settled and near which town?
 - What obstacles might you have had to overcome? Was there a body of water nearby?
4. Have students research and report on one of the following topics related to the settlement of Oklahoma.
 - The Homestead Act.
 - Most popular games played by children and adults.
 - One of the other four land runs that opened Oklahoma lands for settlement.

Physical Education/Health

1. Conduct a Land Run. Secure the use of a football field, track, playground or city park for a land run. Divide the area into a 7 X 7 grid. Mark each square as a claim, using flour, paint, chalk or other acceptable material. Assign a number to each claim and write the number in the square. Depending on the number of students in your class, you may choose not

to mark the squares outside the “Unassigned Lands” area. (See the grid included with this lesson.)

—Have students gather their belongings—backpacks, coats, etc.—to simulate the pioneer family carrying all their belongings.

—Explain that in the land run of 1889, homesteaders lined up all around the perimeter of the Unassigned Lands. Have students line up all around the perimeter of your area.

—With great fanfare, stand in the middle of the area and start the race, or assign helpers around the perimeter, to start the race on all sides, all at the same time.

—Encourage students to run as far as they possibly can. As students become tired, have them sit down in a square. Scatter helpers around the area to resolve disputes.

—When all students have finished the race, have them find the numbers in their squares and remember them or write them down (for Math Activity 1).

2. Brainstorm the difference between the lifestyles of people back in land run days and contemporary lifestyles.

—What would have made people back then healthier? (more exercise, no TV, no video games)

—What factors make us healthier? (more varied diet, advances in medicine, more knowledge of nutrition)

3. Have students walk back to their claims and count the steps (or use pedometers, if available.)

— Ask students how often they think they could walk or run that distance every week? Every day?

—Challenge students to set goals to walk or run at least that distance once or twice a day.

—How many steps would it take to cover the equivalent number of miles? (See math activity below.) Challenge students to walk a set number of steps every day until they have walked the equivalent number of miles from starting line to claim.

Math

1. After the land run (above), have students return to the classroom and estimate the distance they might have travelled if their land run area had been the actual Unassigned Lands.

—Provide a copy of the grid included in this lesson, and have each student find his/her claim number and mark it.

— On an Oklahoma road map, have students draw a square that includes all the counties included in the Unassigned Lands. Then have them divide the square into 49 equal squares to make a grid, and number the squares to match the grid included with this lesson.

—Have students determine the distance they traveled into the free land by finding their number on the grid they have drawn on the Oklahoma road map, measuring the distance from the approximate point where they started and using the road map scale to convert inches to miles.

Vocabulary

border—a boundary especially of a country or state

claim—a right or title to something

colonize—to establish a colony in or on

homestead— a piece of land acquired from U.S. public lands by living on and cultivating it

prairie—a large area of level or rolling grassland

public land—land belonging to all the people, e.g., a public park.

range—open land over which livestock may roam and feed

restrain—to prevent from doing something

right-of-way—a legal right to pass over another person's land

sanction—official permission or approval

settler—a person who goes to live in a new region

territory—a part of the U.S. not included within any state but having a separate governing body

tract—a defined area of land

title—a legal right to the ownership of property

township—a division of territory in surveys of U.S. public land containing 36 square miles (about 93 square kilometers)

Name _____

Unassigned Lands, 1889

A 7x7 grid representing the Unassigned Lands in 1889. The grid is numbered 1 through 49, with the top row (43-49) and bottom row (1-7) being complete. The middle rows (2-6) have missing numbers in the first and fifth columns, indicating an irregular shape. A thick black outline traces the boundary of the land, starting from the top-left corner, following the top edge, then curving down and left, then following a jagged path down and left through the middle rows, then following the bottom edge, then following a jagged path up and right through the middle rows, and finally following the top edge to the top-right corner.

43	44	45	46	47	48	49
36	37	38	39	40	41	42
29	30	31	32	33	34	35
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1	2	3	4	5	6	7