

Show Us Your “True Grit”

Using Problem Solving Processes to Understand the Day-to-Day Challenges Early Ranchers Faced

Introduction

Students need to understand and appreciate how the factors that contribute to our quality of life have changed over the past 100 years. Through examining the problems and challenges early Alberta ranchers faced, students will gain a respect for a very difficult way of life. What was day-to-day life like for the early Alberta ranchers? How did Alberta's physical geography and natural environment both sustain them and challenge them? How did they live without all of our modern conveniences?

Project Explanation

In this project, students will develop an appreciation of the factors contributing to the quality of life in Alberta through investigating the quality of life for the early Alberta ranchers about 100 years ago. Problems that would be very normal for the ranching Mavericks would be much more difficult to solve back then. After doing some general research into the early Alberta ranching lifestyle, students will have to come up with a plan in order to deal with an ordinary problem faced by someone who lived in those times and compare that plan to how we would solve a similar problem now. A short presentation and discussion with the rest of the class will allow them to gain a deeper understanding of how people lived at that time in Alberta.

Materials and Resources Needed

- [Mavericks: An Incorrigible History of Alberta](#)
- Early Rural Life - Ranching
https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/pasttopresent/rural_life/ranching.html
- How the Settlers Survived
<https://www.saskschoolsinfo.com/settlers3.html>
- Inside a Settler's Home
<http://www.saskschoolsinfo.com/settlers5.html>
- Ranching in Alberta
https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/pasttopresent/rural_life/ranching_beginnings.html#:~:text=to%20Related%20Pages!-.Ranching%20in%20Alberta,McDougall%20and%20his%20brother%2C%20David.&text=By%201879%2C%20the%20two%20men,born%20in%20the%20foothills%20region

- Early Rural Life in Alberta
https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/pasttopresent/rural_life/index.html
- History of Cochrane Ranche
https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/pasttopresent/rural_life/cochrane_ranche_history.html
- Bar U Ranch
https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/pasttopresent/rural_life/bar_u_ranch.html
- Pioneer Life
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/pioneer-life>

Procedures

Students will examine day-to-day problems that were faced by ranching families on the open range. They will be given a general problem that demonstrates the difficulties in the lifestyle these people faced as compared to our modern lifestyle. The students will then have to identify the problem(s), figure out the possible causes, brainstorm possible solutions, evaluate the possible solutions (pros and cons), debate the potential solutions in their groups, and decide on a course of action. Finally, they would examine and compare how we would solve the problem now.

Introduce the students to the idea that they will be becoming ranchers back in the 1880's and will have to face some of the difficulties that a ranching family would have had to deal with. Review the problem solving process they will follow and share the manner in which the information will be put together, using writing journals, notepaper, or a graphic organizer.

Students may work individually or in small groups. They will need to choose one of the following problems, either randomly or by personal interest. You may choose to allow more than one group to work on a specific problem and then compare and debate their solutions.

1. You are a "Greenhorn" (a new person who does not know the ropes) and have signed up to come on a cattle drive to Alberta from the United States. How will you learn all the cowboy skills you will need, like taking care of cattle, riding your horse, and roping?
2. You are bringing your family out to Alberta to start up your very own ranch. You are in the middle of the open prairie, when one of your wagon wheels breaks a number of spokes. What will you have to do to get on your way again?

3. Your family has just arrived in Alberta in late August on the open prairies. You want to start your own ranch and raise cattle. What will you do for shelter as winter is coming soon? What materials will you use to build it? How will it be designed?
4. Your family has just arrived in Alberta in late August on the open prairies. You want to start your own ranch and raise cattle. What will you do for food in order to get through the winter?
5. Your family has just arrived in Alberta in late August on the open prairies. You want to start your own ranch and raise cattle. What will you do to make sure your family has clean drinking water? What would you do in the winter when everything freezes over?
6. As there is no such thing as refrigerators, food tends to go rotten very quickly. How will you minimize how much food goes to waste?
7. The trip to Alberta was long and arduous. Your leather boots have a growing hole on the bottom of the sole and water leaks in now. What will you do to either fix them or get new ones?
8. During branding season, one of the calves gets a hold of your shirt and puts a large rip in it. Do you need a new one or can you fix it? Where will you get the money and the materials to fix it?
9. Working with cattle is a dirty business! On a cattle drive while riding your horse on a wet day, mud is kicked up and gets all your favourite clothes extremely soiled and muddy. The cowboys have just stopped for the night and you are very tired. What will you do about your clothes?
10. During the winter at the ranch, your child gets very sick and there is no doctor within an hours ride. What will you do to help them get back to health?
11. Your horse suddenly rears (rises on its hind legs) when you were not expecting it. You fall off and break your leg and there is no doctor within an hours ride. What will you do to get back to health? Who will do the chores and take care of the cattle?
12. The weather during the summer becomes very hot and turns into a drought (a long period of very low rainfall). It has not rained in your area for three months and the creeks, rivers, and sloughs (a type of wetland, it is a depression or hollow on a prairie that is usually filled with water) are drying up. Grasses to feed your cattle are not growing properly. How will you take care of your cattle and your family during the drought?
13. During the winter, a major snowstorm hits, covering all the grasses that the cattle eat. There is also no shelter for your herd and the weaker ones are close to dying. How will you help your herd to survive?
14. Your favourite horse does not see a gopher hole, steps in it and breaks one of his legs. There is no veterinarian to help take care of it. How will you help your horse?

15. In the middle of the night, as you are fast asleep, the cattle begin to wail. The family dog starts barking and will not stop. As you lay in your warm, snuggly bed, you know that something needs to be done. What might be wrong and how will you take care of it?
16. In the days of the open range in Alberta, there were no fences at all between Calgary and Fort Macleod. In the spring and fall, the cowboys would go on a roundup to collect all their cattle, which were identified by their brands. This could take a few weeks of searching for and herding cattle. During this time, how would you meet your basic needs (such as food supply, shelter to sleep in, extra clothing, and taking care of your horses)?
17. The open range in Alberta was a very sparse place to live. The ranchers in your area have children growing up, but there is no school or schoolteachers for them to go to. How would the ranchers have dealt with this problem?
18. You have a young family with six small children. The family needs more space, as the one room house you are in is getting very crowded. How will you solve this? What materials will you use? When would be the best time to work out the shortage of space?
19. During the winter in Alberta, it gets dark very early and the sun comes up late in the morning. At night when it is dark, what will your family do for entertainment in your small, one room house?

The students will begin by identifying the problem or problems that are the causes of the difficulty. What is causing the problem? What are other problems that may come up because of it? What are all the things we will have to take care of in order to solve the problem?

The groups will then work together to brainstorm possible solutions to the problem they have been given. Review the brainstorming process before proceeding.

- Group members may not criticize or evaluate ideas during the session. Criticism may tend to stifle creative thinking.
- Group members should be enthusiastic and let everyone contribute and develop ideas.
- Have fun brainstorming. Come up with as many ideas as possible, from wildly crazy ideas to very practical ones.
- Group members should try to develop other people's ideas, or use those ideas to create brand new ones.
- Appoint one group member to jot down ideas the others come up with.

At this point, students may begin to research and find information on how early Alberta ranchers would have solved these problems using the resources listed above or others that are accessible.

As a group, they would then evaluate the possible solutions (benefits and challenges) that they have come up with. They should narrow them down to the best three to five solutions, and then begin to discuss and debate which one seems the best solution and the reasons why. The group should decide on a fair way to make a final decision and come to a consensus as to what their course of action would be.

Finally, they would examine and compare how we would solve a similar problem now, using the technology and resources that are available to us. Where the solutions very different? Would one solution require a lot more work than the other? Which time would be easier to live in? Which time would you want to live in?

Assessment and Evaluation

- Students and their teacher should develop their own rubric by identifying evaluation criteria for the project that will match their own learner outcomes. This allows students to understand the expectations for their work and to have input into the ongoing evaluation process.
- Individually or in small groups, students might evaluate the work of two or three other students in order to gain insight into how their peers approached the project.
- Students should use their journal to demonstrate their journey through the problem solving process. This will allow the teacher to evaluate whether they looked at all content and possibilities, their brainstorming, the pros and cons they examined for their solution, and why they settled on the solution they did.

Ideas to Enrich this Project

- Student groups could work on the same problems at the same time and debate the validity of their chosen solutions.
- Students could contact a ranching expert to meet with the class and discuss how these problems would be solved on a modern ranch.