

## Get Smart with Art Lesson

### Cattle Drives and Cowboy Poetry

Lesson Created by the Virgin Valley Artists Association of Mesquite, NV

For Parents: In this lesson, students will learn about the great cattle drives of the west and the history of Cowboy Poetry. Students will create a piece of western art.

Supplies Needed: Students may choose from the following supplies to create their art- scraps of paper and glue to make a collage, paper and pencil, markers, acrylic or watercolor paint, brushes and canvas or watercolor paper. If your child resides in Mesquite, NV or the Virgin Valley area and needs supplies for this lesson, send email to [lindaharrisvvaa@gmail.com](mailto:lindaharrisvvaa@gmail.com).

#### For Students:

Cattle drives were a major economic activity in the American West during the mid-1800's to the early 1900's. One major cattle drive was from Texas to railheads in Kansas. Over 27 million cattle were driven to Kansas for shipping to stockyards to the south and east. Cattle



were also driven from Mexico to California, and from Texas to Montana, the Rockies and the Dakotas. Most cattle drives consisted of 1,500- 2,500 head of cattle, about 10 cowboys to herd the cattle, and 5-10 horses per cowboy. The group traveled about 12 miles per day so that the cows would have time to graze and not lose weight. Cowboys worked 24 hours a day, in shifts, watching and protecting the herd. A typical drive could take as long as two months. The group also had a boss, a horse wrangler to handle the spare

horses, and a cook, who drove the chuck wagon. The cook often prepared bread, meat, and beans with bacon and coffee. He also had charge of the medical supplies and had a working knowledge of medicine. The cowboy became known for courage and devotion to duty. He

cared for and herded cattle through swift rivers, thick brush, deep mud and harsh sun. The cowboys shared stories of their experiences through poems. Typical themes for cowboy poetry include stories of the old west, people the cowboys met, ranch work, and the western landscape. Cowboy poetry is a 150-year-old tradition. The first National Cowboy Poetry Gathering was held in 1985 in Elko, Nevada and continues to be held each year. The gathering includes cattle people, western enthusiasts, musicians, and poets. They tell stories, recite poems and sing. Many cities in the United States and Canada have annual “roundups” which are dedicated to cowboy poetry. Cowboy Poetry continues to be written, recited, and enjoyed today.



Your turn: Create a piece of art using scraps of paper and glue to make a collage of a boot or a cowboy hat. Or you might want to draw or paint a picture of a cowboy, a horse, or anything else that inspired you while hearing about the cattle drives. Have fun and be creative!

This lesson was designed and written by Norma Sachar and Linda Harris, VVAA members.