



Telling Stories

Class Activity – Candy on the Open Range

Introduction:

I had the experience of rounding up cattle on my grandfather's farm. He had a small herd of cattle located on a section of land north of the homestead. The area was bordered by barbed wire and electric fences, which helped corral the cows during our small roundups. We moved the cattle toward the homestead many times with a green 1963 Chevy pickup. Surprisingly, rounding up the cattle in this small area wasn't as easy as it looked. Usually we would have one or two cows that drifted from the group. Most of the time we found the strays by the creek on the east side of the pasture. Also, some of the cows would get spooked from the loud exhaust and run in the wrong direction. A job that should have taken 15-20 minutes may have taken all morning.

I cannot imagine trying to locate thousands of cattle stretched across millions of acres of land. To make the situation worse, other cattle owners grazed their cattle on the same public land. Finding and separating all the cattle had to be like finding a needle in a haystack.

The activity below is designed to help the students begin to grasp the huge undertaking of a roundup on the open range. The students will locate small pieces of wrapped candy, buttons, coins, etc. The small items will be placed in two different sections of grass. One of the sections will represent the open range and the other will represent a fenced pasture.

Materials:

- 2 - Sections of grass
- 40 - Cows [Pieces of wrapped candy, buttons, coins, small pieces of green construction paper, etc. (do not eat the candy)]
- 4 - Stakes
- 1 - Roll of string or twine
- 1 - Hammer
- 1 - 25-foot tape measure
- 1 - [Worksheet](#)
- 1 - Stopwatch
- 2 - Plastic bags

Dakota Pathways



Process:

1. Preparation: (Do not complete activity if area has been recently treated with fertilizer, herbicide, or insecticide) The two sections of grass must be located and marked (short grass will not work).

The smaller section (fenced pasture or ranch) should be a 25-foot by 25-foot plot of grass. Place a stake in each of the 4 corners and run a string to each stake forming a square. The plot can be larger if you have a large class. You should place 20 items (cows) on the section. The cows should be green in color (camouflage) and some of them should be hidden under the grass. Mark 10 of the cows with a special brand and the remaining 10 with a different brand.

The larger section (open range) should be considerably larger. You want a section of land at least the size of a football field. The open range section is too large to use stakes and string to enclose it; you should use existing barriers like sidewalks, bushes and trees as markers. Next you need to place 20 items (cows) on the section. The cows should be green in color and some of the cows should be hidden under the grass. Mark 10 of the cows with a special brand and the remaining 10 with a different brand.

2. The students should view Dakota Pathways #18: Cowboys on the Open Range
3. Data collection:

Pasture (25'x25' section) - Divide the students into two separate groups. Each group will be assigned one of the brands drawn on the cows. The two groups will work together rounding up the cows. They will be given 45 seconds to collect as many cows as possible. The cows should be placed in a plastic bag marked pasture.

Open range - Divide the students into two separate groups. Each group will be assigned one of the brands. The two groups will work together rounding up the cows. They will be given 45 seconds to collect as many cows as possible. The cows should be placed in a plastic bag marked open range.

Note: more time may be needed for a small class or tall grass



4. Results / Conclusion

The cows from the open range bag should be separated by brands into two piles. Complete the same process for the pasture bag. The number of cows from each bag should be counted and tabulated on the board. The students should complete the following [worksheet](#) which will help them understand the advantages and disadvantages of grazing cattle on the open range.