

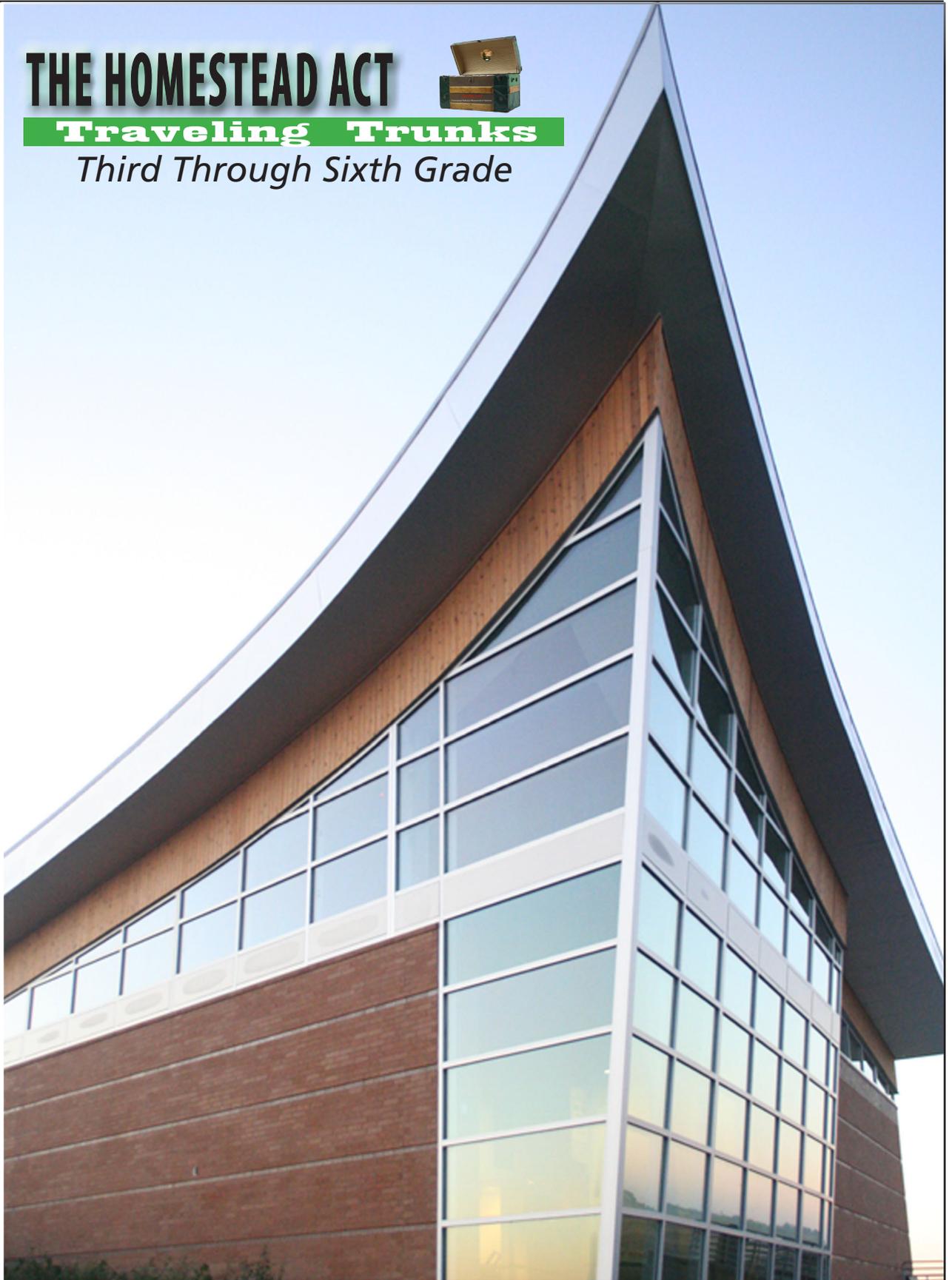
**Free Land was the Cry!**

# THE HOMESTEAD ACT



## Traveling Trunks

*Third Through Sixth Grade*



# Homestead

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Homestead National Monument  
of America, Nebraska



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Our thanks to the following people for their contributions to our project:

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## *Presidential Thoughts on the Homestead Act*



There are certain things we can only do together. There are certain things only a union can do. Only a union could harness the courage of our pioneers to settle the American west, which is why (President Abraham Lincoln) passed a Homestead Act giving a tract of land to anyone seeking a stake in our growing economy.

*President Barack Obama, February 12, 2009*

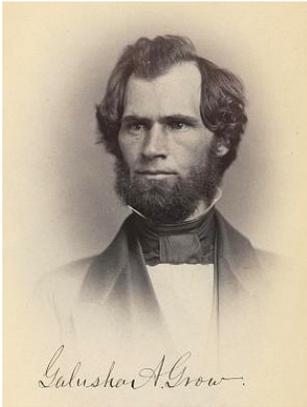
An allusion has been made to the Homestead Law. I think it is worthy of consideration, and that the wild lands of the country should be distributed so that every man should have the means and opportunity of benefitting his condition.

*Abraham Lincoln, February 12, 1861 [replying to comments made by Frederick Oberkline, chairman of a committee representing eighteen German industrial associations that called in a body to pay their respects as Lincoln's "Inaugural" Train stopped in Cincinnati, Ohio]*



The newcomers quickly learned their way about and soon felt at home. The Homestead Act of 1862 provided them, as well as many other pioneers, with an opportunity to acquire land and establish family farms. To the land-hungry immigrants, the tough prairie sod seemed a golden opportunity and they conquered it by hard work.

*Harry S. Truman, June 4, 1948*



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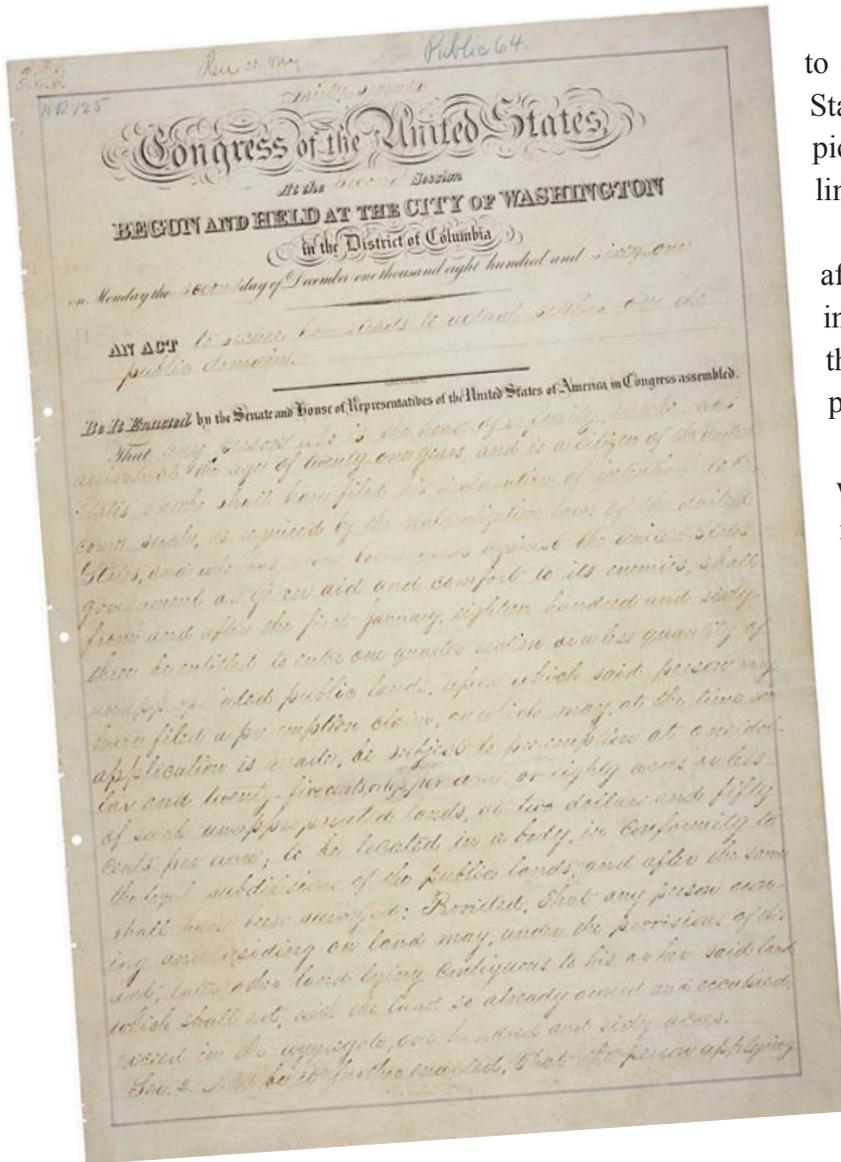
Galusha Grow is the author of the Homestead Act.

This unit has Classroom and Station Activities for teachers to use to help their classes learn about the Homestead Act of 1862 and its impact on America.

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*Some of the ideas in this lesson may have been adapted from earlier, unacknowledged sources without our knowledge. If the reader believes this to be the case, please let us know, and appropriate corrections will be made. Thank you.*

# PROGRAM DESCRIPTION



The Homestead Act of 1862 gave 160 acres of land away to individuals who met certain requirements. In order to file a claim, an individual had to be at least 21 years of age and be the head of household. This law allowed women to file claims and own land. The act also required a person to be a citizen of the United States or declare intention to gain citizenship. This allowed many European immigrants, African-Americans and others to stake claims as well. Many railroads and western towns sent representatives to European countries

to entice people to move to the United States. These representatives showed pictures of beautiful towns with tree-lined streets and rich soil for farming.

The applicant of a claim had to file an affidavit with the local land office stating they met the conditions required by the law. At this time, the claimant would pay a fee of \$12 for filing the paperwork.

Once the filing was complete, there were additional requirements to meet in order to receive the patent and title to the land. A person had to build a home, live on the land, make the land his/her permanent residence, and work the land for a period of 5 years.

Many people who came to claim land paid for the services of a locator. This person would assist them in finding an unclaimed tract of land. Many locators showed individuals land near their own claim in order to “settle” the country and have neighbors nearby.

After living on the land, building a home, and farming the land for 5 years, it was time to “prove up.”

This simply required the homesteader to find two individuals who would serve as witnesses. These witnesses had to state they had known the homesteader for 5 years, knew the claimant had tilled the land and grown crops. With witnesses in tow, a claimant would proceed to the land office to “prove up,” paying another small filing fee of \$6 and having both witnesses sign the final documents. Afterwards, the claimant would receive a final certificate or patent to the land, having met all the conditions.

# CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand the steps of "Proving Up" and apply it to the Homestead Act by designing a "Proving Up" poster.
- Students will interpret and organize data based upon the reading "Homestead Act 1862."
- Students will analyze historical documents.
- Students will be able to identify what documentation was needed to earn a Homestead Patent.
- Students will be able to differentiate between relevant and irrelevant information.
- Students will synthesize the way that the Homestead Act influenced the development of the nation.

# NATIONAL STANDARDS

This unit is broken up into different grade levels, so there are many standards that could apply. These are just a few of them.

## NSS-USH.K-4.1 LIVING AND WORKING TOGETHER IN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES, NOW AND LONG AGO

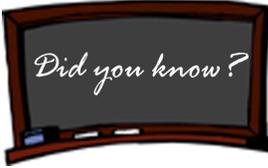
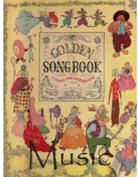
- Understands family life now and in the past, and family life in various places long ago.
- Understands the history of the local community and how communities in North America varied long ago.

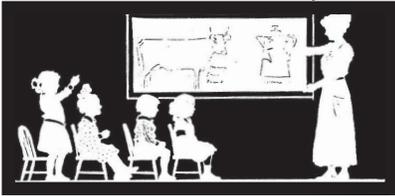
## NSS-USH.K-4.2 THE HISTORY OF STUDENTS' OWN STATE OR REGION

- Understands the people, events, problems, and ideas that were significant in creating the history of their state.

## NSS-USH.5-12.4 ERA 4: EXPANSION AND REFORM (1801-1861)

- Understands United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and American Indians.
- Understands how the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions.
- Understands the extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800.
- Understands the sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period.

<b>SPECIAL ICONS</b>		<i>Enrichment Activities</i>				
	Indicates a reproducible handout is included	Indicates advanced lessons	Indicates an additional math lesson	Indicates a little known fact about the subject	Indicates an additional music or art activity	Indicates an additional language arts lesson



# LAND OF DREAMS



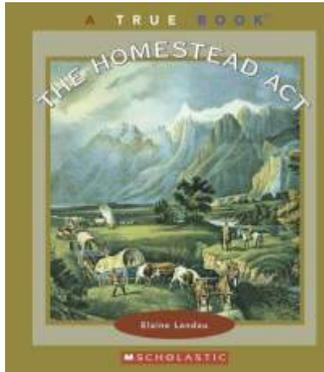
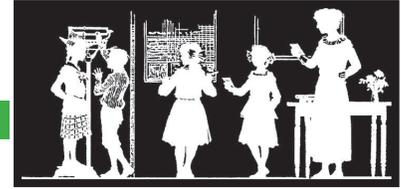
## Land of Dreams

A good way to introduce the impact of the Homestead Act is by watching the film *Land of Dreams: Homesteading America*. It takes you on a journey through 30 states and 123 years of homesteading history. From President Thomas Jefferson's vision of an American West settled with small farms, to the reality of its vast checkerboard landscape. *Land of Dreams* lets you tour homesteads from Nebraska to Alaska. You visit with homesteaders, their descendants, and American Indians. You witness personal stories of struggle and success. See how the land was lost and claimed, settled and tamed. See cabins built, but then abandoned, and farms of today as you explore the legacy of the 1862 Homestead Act with *Land of Dreams*.

**At the conclusion of the film discuss the following questions:**

- What was it like for homesteaders and American Indians before and after the Homestead Act?
- What changed for homesteaders and American Indians?
- What was good and bad about the Homestead Act?
- What price did the settlers pay and the American Indians pay for the Homestead Act in terms of what was gained and what was lost?

# THE HOMESTEAD ACT, A TRUE BOOK



## The Homestead Act, A True Book

by Elaine Landau

The Homestead Act of 1862 opened the door to settlement in the American West. The act promised acres of public land to nearly anyone who filed a claim and lived on the property for five years. It encouraged thousands to leave their homes to seek new opportunities and in the process changed the landscape of the West forever.

### Introductory Set

As a class or have students discuss together in their groups:

Why does your family live in the community that they do?

Why do people move from one place to another?

Imagine you are living in the 1860's, where in the United States would you most likely live?

Remember: American Indians lived throughout the 30 homesteading states, but there were few others living on the plains.

### Process

Individually or in their group, have students read the book "The Homestead Act, A True Book" .

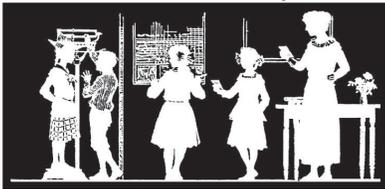
**Students should answer the following questions in regard to the Homestead Act, A True Book**

- What did people see and hear that made them think about moving west?
- What did the government want that caused them to break their treaties with the American Indians?
- What were some challenges to getting people to move to the new frontier?
- How did the government make it easier for people to move west?
- Discuss with the students the meaning of the important words.

There is a crossword in the Homestead Handouts to reinforce definitions.



## Station Activity #2



# THE HOMESTEAD ACT



This activity introduces the Homestead Act of 1862 to students. In the station folder, students will find copies of "The Homestead Act 1862 Reading". This is a general introduction which encompasses President Lincoln's goals for the Homestead Act along with possible strengths and weaknesses of the Homestead Act.

Have the students read "The Homestead Act of 1862 Reading" and then individually or in their groups have students organize the data into the graphic organizer into following segments:

- Goals of Homestead Act
- Strengths of Homestead Act
- Weaknesses of Homestead Act

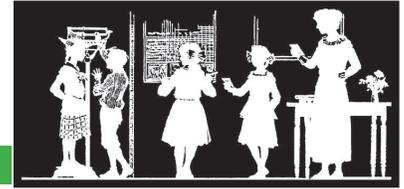


For older students ask them to then read The Homestead Act of 1862 (copies provided in the station folder) and answer the following questions:

- What year was the Homestead Act signed and what year did it take effect?
- Explain the main purpose of the Homestead Act.
- What were the goals of the Homestead Act?
- President Lincoln came from a poor family, how would the Homestead Act have helped his family?
- Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the Homestead Act.
- Would you have gone west for free land? Why or Why not?



# WAGON WHEELS



The Homestead Act went into effect January 1, 1863, the same day that President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, setting African-Americans free. Remember the Civil War is still raging on during this time. Many African-Americans began looking to the west as a place where they would finally have the freedom to own their own land.

This station discusses the book *Wagon Wheels* by Barbara Brenner. It is a story of a black family emigrating from Kentucky to Nicodemus, Kansas after the Civil War. They had heard about the free land of the Homestead Act.

This is an easy book to read, so there are varying levels of questions for older students indicated with an asterisk. Copies of both sets of questions are available in the Homestead Handouts.

Here is a sampling of the questions:

Why did Mr. Muldie leave?

Who did he leave in charge and how old are they?

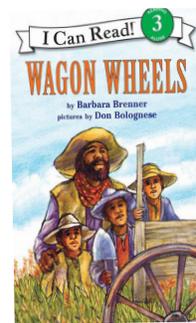
\* Do you think you could have hunted and fished for your own food?

Why did everyone run for the river?

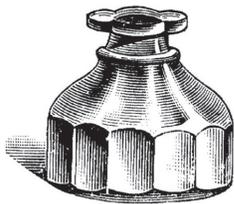
\* Prairie fires are not always bad. How can a prairie fire be good?

How far did the Muldie brothers have to go and how did they travel?

\* If the Muldie brothers had to walk 150 miles, and it took them 22 days to get there, how many miles did they average each day?



## Enrichment Activities



Important pieces of our history are preserved by the National Archives and Records Administration. The Emancipation Proclamation, like the Homestead Act of 1862 is among the top 100 Milestone Documents.

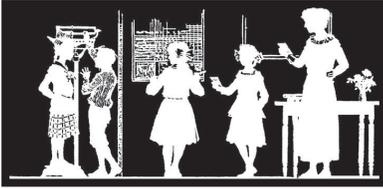
Read the document and find out more details at

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=34>

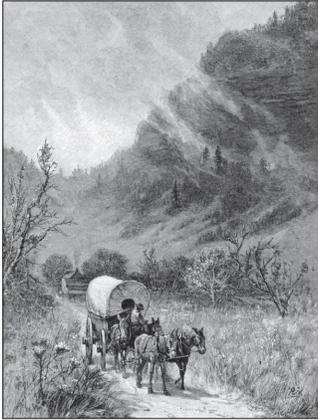


Each national park site has its own special story to tell. Homestead National Monument of America's story is about homesteading, but there are other sites to visit which will increase your understanding of the pioneer experience. Former enslaved African Americans left Kentucky in organized colonies at the end of the of post-Civil War Reconstruction period to experience freedom on the free soils of Kansas. Nicodemus represents the involvement of African Americans in the western expansion and settlement of the Great Plains. It is the oldest and only remaining all Black Town west of the Mississippi River. Visit [www.nps.gov/nico](http://www.nps.gov/nico) for more information.

## Station Activity #4



# PROVING UP!



Where did the thousands of settlers and families who moved west come from? Some came from the East, but many homesteaders came from areas close to their new homesteads. Railroads also advertised overseas to promote people moving west.

Getting “Free Land” wasn’t complicated. It was similar to getting land today in that you started by filling out an application. Read through the Homestead Act of 1862 to find the answers to the following questions.

**What were the requirements in order to claim your own homestead under the terms of the Homestead Act?**

**What did you have to do on the land?**

**How did you “Prove Up?”**

**Why couldn’t Confederate soldiers make a claim for land?**

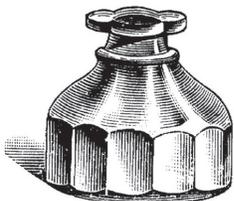
**Did the Homestead Act impose any restrictions upon immigrants who came to America to file land claims?**

**Who else besides white males could claim land?**

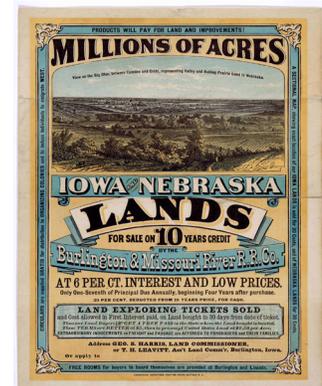
**Do you feel that the Homestead Act was progressive for the times? Why or Why not?**



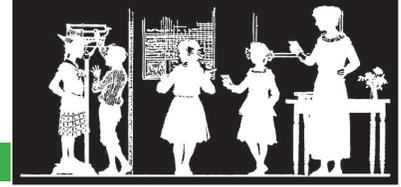
## Enrichment Activities



Have students draw a poster advertising Free Land so people will move west. After they have drawn their poster, have them write a speech to go with their poster to try and entice people to move west. Have them compare this type of advertising to our advertising today.



# USING PRIMARY SOURCES



## *Be a History Detective* Claim My Homestead



A **primary** source is a document or physical object which was written or created during the time you are studying. These sources were present during an experience or time period and offer an inside view of a particular event. Some types of primary sources include:

ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS		CREATIVE WORKS		RELICS OR ARTIFACTS	
diaries	manuscripts	poetry	music	pottery	furniture
letters	interviews	drama	art	clothing	buildings
autobiographies	official records	novels			

A **secondary** source interprets and analyzes primary sources. These sources are one or more steps removed from the event. Secondary sources may have pictures, quotes or graphics of primary sources in them.

Staking a claim and living on it was often challenging for homesteaders. In this activity students will examine **Homestead Land Record Case Files** and answer the questions to discover more about the homesteaders.

Working individually or in their station groups, students will examine a **Homestead Land Record Case File** provided. Students will answer the questions on their History Detective sheet. A guide has been provided to help students find the related documents to the questions.



If time allows after the activity, discuss the following questions with the class a whole about the activity.

How many of your files were easy to read?

Why weren't they easy to read?

Was there anything interesting in your file that you want to share?

For a person to claim land under the Homestead Act of 1862 they would have to do all of this paperwork.

Do you think you would have been able to meet all the requirements?

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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## Books

*The Homestead Act, A True Book*, by Elaine Landau, Children's Press, 2006

*Wagon Wheels*, by Barbara Brenner, Harper Collins, 1978



National Park Service Nicodemus National Historic Site  
[www.nps.gov/nico](http://www.nps.gov/nico)

# The Homestead Act, A True Book

Why does your family live in the community that they do?

Why do people move from one place to another?

Imagine you are living in the 1860's, where in the United States they would most likely live?  
Remember: American Indians lived throughout the 30 Homesteaded states, but there were few others living on the plains.

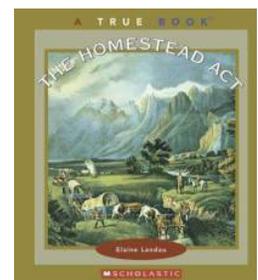
What did people see and hear that made them think about moving west?

What did the government want that caused them to break their treaties with the American Indians?

What were some challenges to getting people to move to the new frontier?

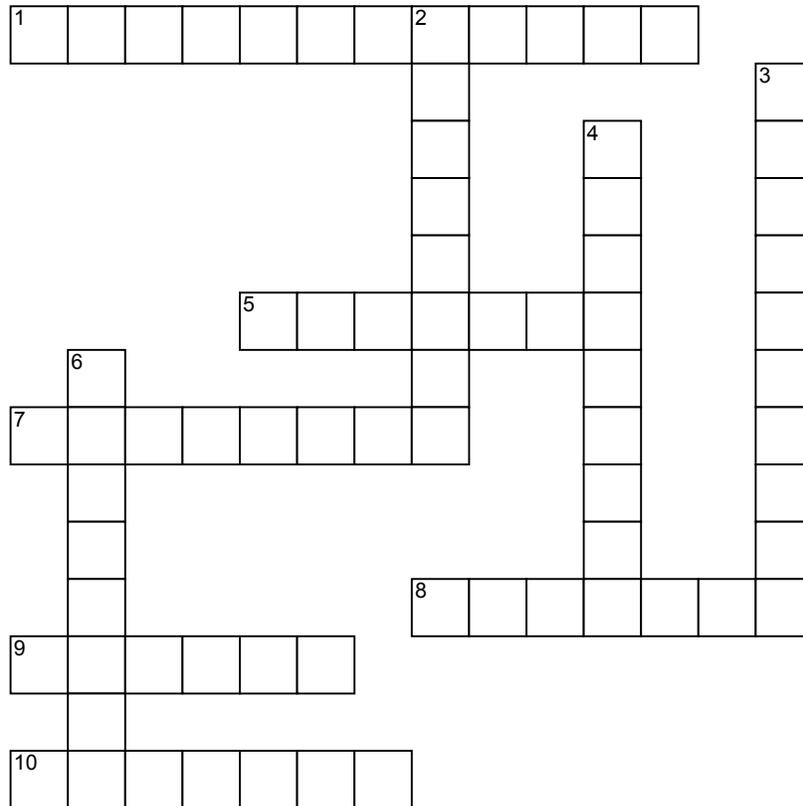
How did the government make it easier for people to move west?

Complete The Homestead Act True Book Vocabulary Crossword Puzzle.



# The Homestead Act

## True Book Vocabulary



This puzzle was made by Homestead National Monument of America using Crossword Weaver(TM)

### ACROSS

- 1 areas of land on which some American Indians were forced to live
- 5 a large grassy area with few trees
- 7 long periods of very dry weather
- 8 sod houses made of dirt and grass bricks cut from the soil
- 9 women whose husbands have died
- 10 to develop or improve the land

### DOWN

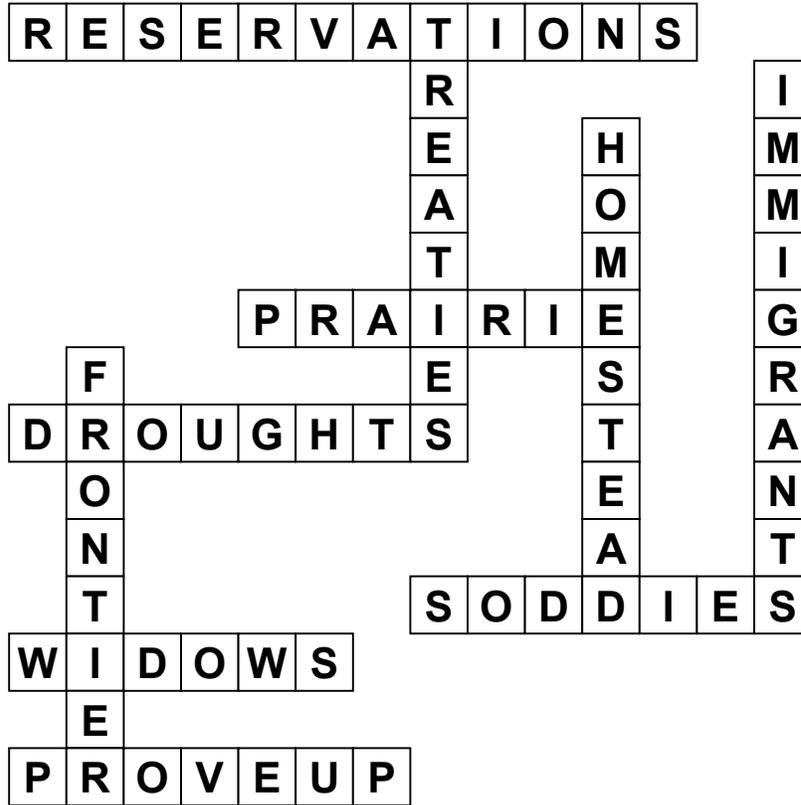
- 2 formal agreements between groups, such as the United States government and Indian nations
- 3 people who come to a new country to live there permanently
- 4 a piece of land given by the government to a settler
- 6 the edge of an area that is still largely unsettled by people

**WORD BANK:** Droughts, frontier, homestead, immigrants, prairie, proveup, reservations, soddies, treaties, widows.

# The Homestead Act

True Book Vocabulary

Solution:



## The Homestead Act of 1862 Reading

Imagine yourself as a young person in a place where all the land has been taken. You might want to become a farmer, but there is no land available. Then imagine seeing advertisements for land, some for very little money, some for free!!! You face unknowns. What will this land really be like? Will there be enough rainfall to grow your crops? Will you have neighbors? Who will they be? What about the people who are already on the land?

Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law on May 20, 1862. The Homestead Act encouraged western migration by providing settlers 160 acres of free public land.

The major goal of the Homestead Act of 1862, which took effect on January 1, 1863, was to encourage settlement of the west. If homesteaders built a home and improved the property for five years then they had the chance to a "free title" for that quarter section of land. A second goal was to connect the west to the north politically and economically during the Civil War. Remember the Civil War was still raging and there were no southern representatives in Congress when the bill was passed!

One of President Lincoln's ideas about this act was to provide land to poor people who wanted to farm or find a new life. Lincoln himself grew up poor, his family moved several times in search of land. The Homestead Act, however, wasn't an end to poverty. Why? Few people could afford to build a farm or acquire the necessary tools, seed and livestock. It wasn't as easy as it looked to be a successful farmer. Most of the land had never been plowed, therefore the soil was hard and the grasses tall!! In addition to these problems some of the land lay in regions that had too little rainfall for ranching or farming. Ranching required four times the amount of land given so if you were going to ranch you had to have money to buy the additional acres for \$1.25 per acre. Remember, the Homestead Act involved ALL the territory west of the Mississippi. Those homesteaders who stayed and became successful, did so because of sheer determination and hard work by the entire family.

President Lincoln also pushed for building a railroad across the country. Why? The railroad would connect the west to the north during the Civil War, which would bring people, soldiers, weapons, livestock and supplies. It would also carry immigrants or homesteaders bound for new land. The railroad was faster and easier than a wagon train. It was also more expensive, which was a problem for many homesteaders.

One other interesting fact about the Homestead Act was that after 6 months of living on the land, homesteaders were given the option to purchase their land right then, for \$1.25 per acre. Most of the land went to cattlemen, miners, lumbermen, and railroads, and speculators. Of some 500 million acres of land dispersed by the General Land Office, between 1862 and 1904, only 80 million acres actually went to homesteaders. However, small farmers did acquire more land under the Homestead Act in the 20th century than in the 19th.

# Homestead Act of 1862

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Goals

Strengths

Weaknesses

## **Homestead Act Discussion Questions**

Read the Homestead Act of 1862 and then answer the following questions:

What year was the Homestead Act signed and what year did it take effect?

Explain the main purpose of the Homestead Act.

What were the goals of the Homestead Act?

President Lincoln came from a poor family, how would the Homestead Act have helped his family?

Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the Homestead Act.

Would you have gone west for free land? Why or Why not?

# Homestead Act Discussion Questions

## KEY

What year was the Homestead Act signed and what year did it actually take effect?

1862, 1863

Explain the main purpose of the Homestead Act.

It encouraged Western migration by providing settlers 160 acres of free public land.

What were the goals of the Homestead Act?

To encourage settlement of the West and connect the West to the North politically and economically.

President Lincoln came from a poor family, how would the Homestead Act have helped his family?

Poor people could get a 160 acres of land just by living on it and farming it for 5 years.

Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the Homestead Act.

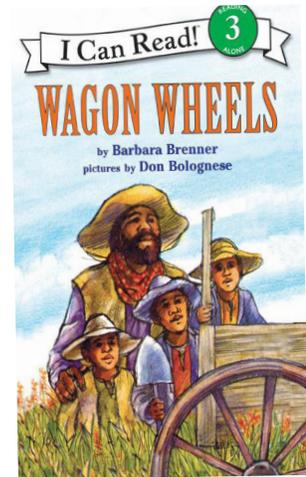
Strengths: More people settled in the west. Small farmers received land for free. A railroad was built which connected the west to the north, the Union side during the Civil War. Railroads were faster transportation than wagon trains. The Homestead Act brought immigrants from other countries.

Weaknesses: Farming took livestock, seeds, and tools. The land had never been plowed and the grasses were tall. Some regions did not have enough rainfall for farming and ranching. Ranching took more than 160 acres. Additional acres cost \$1.25 per acre. The railroad was a more expensive way to travel. More land actually went to businesses than small farmers.

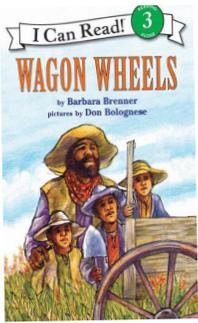
Would you have gone West for the free land? Why or why not?

Personal opinion

# Wagon Wheels



1. What kind of house did the Muldie family build?
2. Why did they have to build this kind of house?
3. What made their house a home?
4. What did the Muldie family need?
5. Why couldn't they get it? Who helped them?
6. How did the Muldie brothers first feel about those that helped them?
7. Why did Mr. Muldie leave?
8. Who did he leave in charge and how old are they?
9. Why did everyone run for the river?
10. How far did the Muldie brothers have to go and how did they travel?
11. What visitor did they have during the night during their trip and how did they get them to leave?



## Wagon Wheels

1. What kind of house did the Muldie family build and why?
  2. What made their house a home? What would you experience in a house like this?
  3. What did the Muldie family need? Why couldn't they get it? Who helped them?
  4. How did the Muldie brothers first feel about those that helped them? What did Pa say about them?
  5. Why did Mr. Muldie leave? Who did he leave in charge and how old are they?
  6. Do you think you could have hunted and fished for your own food?
  7. Prairie fires are not always bad. How can a prairie fire be good?
  8. How far did the Muldie brothers have to go and how did they travel?
  9. What visitor did they have during the night during their trip and how did they get them to leave?
  10. If the Muldie brothers had to walk 150 miles, and it took them 22 days to get there,  
how many miles did they average each day?
- Bonus: Choose somewhere that is between 150 and 200 miles from where you are.  
Using a map, map the route you would take. How long would it take you to get there?  
How is your mode of travel different than the Muldie brother?

# Proving Up!

Answer the following questions.

What were the requirements in order to claim your own homestead under the terms of the Homestead Act?

What did you have to do on the land?

How did you “Prove Up?”

Why couldn’t Confederate soldiers make a claim for land?

Did the Homestead Act impose any restrictions upon immigrants who came to America to file land claims?

Who else besides white males could claim land?

Do you feel that the Homestead Act was progressive for the times? Why or Why not?

# Proving Up! Key

## What were the requirements in order to claim your own homestead under the terms of the Homestead Act?

- You had to be 21 or head of household.
- You had to be a U.S. citizen or declare intentions to become a citizen.
- You could not have been a Confederate soldier or have borne arms against this country!
- You acknowledged that you did not already own over 320 acres of land within the U.S. or that you had not quit or abandoned other land in the same state or territory.
- You told the government that the land would be for your exclusive use.

## What did you have to do on the land?

- Move on to the land and live on it for five years.
- Farm it and make “improvements” like a house, barn, or fences.

## How did you “Prove Up?”

- Two witnesses had to swear they had known you were on the land for five years.
- Prove you were head of the household and a citizen.
- Prove that you were living and farming the land claimed for all five years.
  - You had to show crops, gardens, livestock etc.
- Prove that you had built a house and point out what kind of improvements you made.
  - For example added window, doors, and sheds.

## Why couldn't Confederate soldiers make a claim for land?

- Confederate soldiers were not allowed to apply due to the fact that they had borne arms against this country in the Civil War.

## Did the Homestead Act impose any restrictions upon immigrants who came to America to file land claims?

- Any immigrant “legally” entering our country was eligible to claim land.
- They also had to declare their intent to become a citizen.

## Who else besides white males could claim land?

- A single woman or mother.
- African-Americans.

## Do you feel that the Homestead Act was progressive for the times? Why or Why not?

- Personal opinion.



## History Detectives Grades 3-6 Guide



The Homestead Land Entry Case File contains all the documents a Homesteader would have filed. This activity is designed for multiple grade levels, so you do not need every document in the file. The documents you need are:

Initial Application Form 4-007  
Homestead Affidavit Form 4-063

Certificate of Citizenship  
Receiver's Receipt Form 4-137  
Homestead Proof-Testimony of Claimant Form 4-369  
Homestead Proof-Testimony of Witness (There are two of these) Form 4-369  
Final Certificate Form 4-196  
Initial Application Wrapper  
Final Application Wrapper

Please note, that a wrapper is like an envelope and was what was wrapped around all the documents. There are two in your package. You will know it is a wrapper because it is a piece of paper broken down into 3 columns with writing in the middle column. Sometimes there are date stamps in the other columns.

What is the name of your homesteader?

**Hint: All the documents will have their name.**

What section did they claim land?  
What township did they claim land?  
What range did they claim land?

**Hint: Initial Application Form 4-007  
Final Certificate Form 4-196  
Both Application Wrappers**

How much money did they pay for their initial application?

**Hint: Receiver's Receipt Form 4-137**

Was your homesteader initially a citizen of the United States?

**Hint: Homestead Affidavit**

If not, what date did they become a citizen of the United States?

**Hint: Certificate of Citizenship**

Who were the witnesses who testified for the homesteader?

**Hint: Homestead Proof-Testimony of Witness**

What improvements did the homesteader make on their land?

**Hint: Homestead Proof-Testimony of Witness and Homestead Proof-Testimony of Claimant**

What date did the homesteader file their initial claim?

**Hint: Initial Application Form 4-007 and the wrapper of Form 4-007**

What date did the homesteader file their final claim?

**Hint: Final Certificate Form 196 and the wrapper of Form 4-196**

**BONUS:** How long did it take for this homesteader to "prove up"?

**Hint: Subtract the date of the final homestead claim from the initial homestead claim.**



## History Detectives

Grades 3-6



What is the name of your homesteader? \_\_\_\_\_

What section did they claim land? \_\_\_\_\_

What township did they claim land? \_\_\_\_\_

What range did they claim land? \_\_\_\_\_

How much money did they pay for their initial application? \_\_\_\_\_

Was your homesteader initially a citizen of the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

If not, what date did they become a citizen of the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

Who were the witnesses who testified for the homesteader?

\_\_\_\_\_

What improvements did the homesteader make on their land?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What date did the homesteader file their initial claim? \_\_\_\_\_

What date did the homesteader file their final claim? \_\_\_\_\_

How was the experience of this homesteader different from a farmer today?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How was it the same?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### BONUS QUESTION:

How long did it take for this homesteader to "prove up" \_\_\_\_\_

Place holder for the case file answers

Place holder for the case file answers