

One-on-One Cowboys

Keep Calm and Cowboy On A Short Primer on the American Cowboy



The origin of the cowboy starts in 6th century Spain. Christopher Columbus had just returned from new world with tales of riches and plentiful land. Wealthy Spanish landowners wanting to expand their holdings soon followed.

They quickly discovered that the new world possessed a climate perfect for raising large herds of cattle. In Spain, landowners employed horse-mounted herdsman called Vaqueros to take care of the cattle. Vaca is the Spanish word for cow, this is where the word cowboy comes from.

As settlers moved into the Texas and New Mexico territories, these men and women adopted the practical ways of the vaquero culture, borrowing clothing styles and learning how to drive their cattle in the same way.

Cowboy Life

Cowboys were mostly young men who needed cash. The average cowboy in the West made about 30 dollars a month. They were in charge of herding cattle and helped care for horses. They repaired fences and buildings and worked cattle drives.

Trail drives were needed to get cattle to Northern markets. The typical outfit consisted of a trail boss, fifteen hired-hands, each with a string of at least ten horses; a wrangler who handled the horses; and a cook, who drove the chuck wagon. On the trail they would travel roughly 10 miles a day. After settling the cattle and tying up the horses, the tired men ate supper prepared by the cook and bedded down on the hard ground.
(continued)



The
**PURPLE
PRIMER**

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Keep Calm and Cowboy On A Short Primer on the American Cowboy (continued)

Cowboys typically wore large hats with wide brims to protect them from the sun, and boots to help them ride horses. Being a cowboy was hard work! Workdays lasted about 15 hours, and most of that time was on horseback.



Did you know?

Samuel A. Maverick was a rancher who refused to brand his cattle. Maverick figured that all Texas ranchers branded their cattle, and that if he left his calves unbranded he could then claim every unbranded steer in the country. *Because of him, a person with an independent spirit is called a maverick.*

Author, Zane Grey published Riders of the Purple Sage in 1912 and helped launch the Western as a new literary genre. By the 1930's it is estimated that Zane Grey's *Westerns had been read by over half of the United States*. The wild exploits of the cowboys helped to feed the imagination of people at a time when the cowboy way of life was becoming a thing of the past.

It is long past the time of cattle drives and we are still wearing cowboy boots, watching cowboy movies and listening to cowboy music. The cowboy was more than just an animal herder, *he came to represent an American Ideal*. Perhaps this is why the Cowboy Culture continues to resonate with people today.

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Keep Calm and Cowboy On

Every Picture Tells a Story

A photograph can capture a moment in history and keep it for all time.

How to Enjoy: Observe the photograph closely.

Ideas for discussion:

What immediate thoughts come to mind?

What do you notice first?

What is the physical setting?

What small details are present that might be easily overlooked at first glance?

If someone took this photograph today, what would be different?



Cowboy (1887)
John C. H. Grabill

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Listen

Cowboy songs are ballads; meaning they are stories in song.

How to Enjoy: Share thoughts or favorite phrases and rhymes within this ballad.

A basic Ballad stanza has the rhyme at the end of the second and fourth lines. Can you find the 4 rhyming lines in this stanza?

Chorus of “Red River Valley”

From this valley they say you are going.
We will miss your bright eyes and sweet smile,
For they say you are taking the sunshine
That has brightened our pathway a while.
So come sit by my side if you love me.
Do not hasten to bid me adieu.
Just remember the Red River Valley,
And the cowboy that has loved you so true.

The cowboy is known for being a straight shooter. Here are some of the truths he lived by.

How to Enjoy: Read and discuss the following cowboy quotes. Consider these prompts for each quote:

- What do you think this quotation means?
- Give a “real life” example of what this quote is about.

- If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging.
- Never ask a barber if you need a haircut.
- Speak your mind, but ride a fast horse.
- Don't let your yearnings get ahead of your earnings.
- If you climb in the saddle, be ready for the ride.
- Life is simpler when you plough around the stump.