

would be sold. The Indian Rights Association claimed that private ownership of land would lead to “the gradual breaking up of the reservations.” This assessment proved correct. In less than 50 years, they lost two thirds of their land. Some of the land was sold to settlers and developers as surplus when allotments were made. In other cases, Indians sold or were cheated out of their allotments.

Despite the government’s hopes, many American Indians rejected individual family farming. Even before the Dawes Act, the government had tried to force the Navajo to abandon sheep raising and become settled farmers. The U.S. Army waged military campaigns against the Navajo in northwestern New Mexico and northeastern Arizona in 1863. Soldiers destroyed Navajo houses, herds of sheep, and corn crops. Without food or shelter, many Navajo surrendered in early 1864.

That same year, the U.S. Army led the Navajo on the Long Walk, a forced march to the Bosque Redondo Reservation in eastern New Mexico. Soldiers stationed at nearby Fort Sumner prevented the Navajo from leaving the reservation. The U.S. government gave the Navajo seeds and farming tools, but the land was not suitable for farming. Because the few trees were quickly cut down, the Navajo had to use roots for firewood. Many Navajo died from malnutrition and disease.

In 1868 the government admitted its failure and granted the Navajo a reservation in New Mexico and Arizona. They rebuilt their communities, concentrating on sheep raising, weaving, and silversmithing. By the 1880s their economy had improved and their population had begun to increase.

READING CHECK: Drawing Conclusions Why did attempts to force the Plains Indians to become farmers fail?



INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

Assimilation. These photographs show three American Indian boys before and after they attended an American Indian school. *What evidence of their assimilation can you see?*

SECTION 1 REVIEW

1. Identify and explain:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- John M. Chivington
- Sand Creek Massacre
- Sitting Bull
- George Armstrong Custer
- Battle of the Little Bighorn
- Wovoka
- Massacre at Wounded Knee
- Chief Joseph
- Geronimo
- Sarah Winnemucca
- Dawes General Allotment Act

2. Categorizing Copy the chart below. Use it to describe the conflicts between the United States and various American Indian nations.

Nation & Leader	Conflict	Outcome
Cheyenne		
Sioux		
Nez Percé		
Apache		

3. Finding the Main Idea

- a. Why did the U.S. government attempt to resettle American Indians on reservations?
- b. Provide a brief history of the relations between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Plains Indians.
- c. How did American Indians resist attempts to assimilate them into white culture?

4. Writing and Critical Thinking

Drawing Conclusions Imagine that you are a member of Sitting Bull’s war party. Write a fictional short story about the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

Consider:

- what the root causes of the conflict were
- how each side viewed the other
- which mistakes each side made in dealing with the other side

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READ TO DISCOVER

1. How did the U.S. government promote economic development in the West?
2. Why did people migrate west?
3. How did the environment influence farming practices and daily life in the West?
4. What difficulties did farm families face on the Great Plains?

DEFINE

sod houses
bonanza farm

IDENTIFY

Homestead Act
Pacific Railway Act
Morrill Act
Exodusters
Benjamin Singleton
U.S. Department of
Agriculture
Willa Cather

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY

Farming is still central to the economy of the Great Plains states, as well as much of the world. Use [CNN.com](#) or other **current events** sources to learn about new farming methods being developed today. Record your findings in your journal.

[CNN.com](#)
NEWS.com

Western Farmers

EYEWITNESSES
TO History

“To say that I was homesick, discouraged, and lonely, is but a faint [poor] description of my feelings. . . . Not a tree, plant nor shrub on which to rest my weary eye, to break the monotony of the sand beds and cactus of the Great American Desert.”

—Annie Green, *Sixteen Days on the Great American Desert*

Annie Green moved to Colorado in 1870. She and her husband were among the thousands of American families who headed west to the Great Plains in the years following the Civil War. Green felt like “a stranger in a strange land” in her new home. In order to support her husband, she “resolved . . . to cultivate [develop] a cheerful disposition.” Like many settlers, Green and her family discovered that hard work, determination, and a little luck were necessary to prosper.



Posters like this one persuaded many people that a better life waited for them out west.

Economic Development of the West

During the Civil War, Republicans tried to manage western development so that new western states and territories would be free of slavery. They also wanted these areas to be populated by independent farmers who would improve the land. After the southern states seceded from the Union, Republicans passed a series of acts in 1862 to turn public lands into private property.

Land acts. Three government land acts increased non-Indian settlement of the Great Plains. The **Homestead Act** permitted “any citizen or intended citizen to select any surveyed land up to 160 acres and to gain title to it after five years’ residence” if the person cultivated the land. The Civil War slowed the initial response to the act. Eventually, some 400,000 families took advantage of the offer. The **Pacific Railway Act** gave lands to railroad companies to develop a railroad line linking the East and West coasts. The **Morrill Act** granted a total of more than 17 million acres of federal land to the states. The act ordered the sale of this land to finance the construction of agricultural and engineering colleges. The Morrill Act led to the eventual founding of more than 70 state universities.

Competition for land was fierce. In March 1889, for example, President Benjamin Harrison announced that land would be available to the first takers beginning at noon on April 22. By the appointed day, about 50,000 people had gathered to race one another for the land. Some rode horses or bicycles. Others pushed wheelbarrows filled with supplies. Subsequent “runs” took place in other parts. In October 1889 a flood of prospective settlers responded to a government offer of inexpensive homesteads in Oklahoma. The acreage came from former Creek and Seminole lands. This occurred at the expense of American Indians, who lost more than 11 million acres in Oklahoma to non-Indian settlers.

The railroads. Railroad companies also lured settlers to the West. Between 1869 and 1883, four rail lines were built across the West. Within 10 years of the passage of the Pacific Railway Act, the U.S. government had given railroad companies more than 125 million acres of public land. State and local governments donated nearly 100 million acres of additional land. These grants limited the amount of land available to settlers under the Homestead Act. Government officials believed that railroad companies would promote western settlement and economic growth. Railroad companies sold any surplus land to homesteaders in an effort to offset the high cost of laying tracks. The homesteaders benefited from the nearby railroad lines, using them to ship their crops to distant markets.

Eager to encourage settlement along their rail routes, railroad companies advertised in the East and in Europe. They offered to pay the fares of potential land buyers and sell them land on credit. Some railroad companies gave free trips to newspaper reporters, who then wrote glowing reports. One Indiana editor wrote about his trip:



“I never saw finer country in the world than that part of Kansas passed over by the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe [rail]road. Corn waist high, wheat in the shock [stacked], oats in fine condition, and vegetables in abundance.”

—Indiana editor, quoted in *The Farmers' Frontier, 1865–1900*, by Gilbert C. Fite

READING CHECK: Drawing Conclusions How did the U.S. government encourage the growth of private property ownership on the Great Plains?

Moving West

Three main groups traveled westward after the Civil War: white Americans from the East, African Americans from the South, and immigrants from foreign countries. Some sought economic opportunity. Others hoped to find racial tolerance.

The majority of white settlers moved from states in the Mississippi Valley, where land had grown expensive and difficult to obtain. Because of the high cost of transporting supplies, it was mainly middle-class farmers and businesspeople who could afford to move west. Some farmers came in search of more fertile soil. Civil War veterans, particularly those from the South, came to make a new start. A Nebraska newcomer explained, “I am well satisfied that I can do better here than I can in Illinois.” Susan Lomax, who moved west with her family from Mississippi, offered a different reason: “We wanted to come to a new country so our children could grow up with the country.”

For African Americans, moving west offered a chance to escape the violence and persecution they faced following the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877. Kansas particularly appealed to African American settlers, as John Brown had fought against slavery there. The biggest exodus, or mass departure, of black settlers with so-called Kansas Fever occurred in 1879. Some 20,000 to 40,000 African Americans fled the South, where violence had broken out during



INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

The road west. With tickets like this one, many migrants rode the rails to their new homes in the West, sometimes riding on flat-cars to get there. **What do you think travel conditions were like for the migrants in this photograph?**



This Schuttler Wagon Company advertisement depicts farmers migrating to the West in search of fertile soil.





INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

Exodusters. Many African Americans hoped to escape discrimination in the South by moving west. *What evidence can you see that this family is homesteading on the Great Plains?*

elections in 1878. Known as **Exodusters**, these African American settlers trekked west, following leaders such as **Benjamin Singleton**, a 70-year-old former slave.

European immigrants also flocked to the West. “America Fever” infected thousands of Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes. In 1882 alone, more than 100,000 Scandinavians moved to the American West. In addition, many Irish who had helped build the railroads and a great number of Germans who had settled in the Mississippi Valley decided to move to the Plains.

Russian Mennonites, members of a Protestant sect, also migrated to the Great Plains. After the Russian czar ended the Mennonites’ special privileges, among them exemption from military service, American railroad companies urged them to move to the United States. The Mennonites brought with them experience in farming wheat on the Russian steppes, or grasslands, including a hardy wheat variety that thrived on the Great Plains. They may have also brought the Russian thistle, a plant that became well known throughout the West as the tumbleweed.

Many of the Chinese immigrants who had come to the United States during the California Gold Rush had also turned to farming by 1880. In California alone, some 3,200 Chinese farmers raised crops in 1880. Throughout the West, Chinese immigrants worked as farm laborers, produce vendors, or sharecroppers. Some owned large farms. In 1870 one Chinese farmer in Sacramento County, California, earned \$9,500 from farming—an enormous amount for that period.

✓ **READING CHECK: Categorizing** Why did various groups of people migrate to the West?

Western Environments and Farming

Although settlers homesteaded some 80 million acres of public land in the Great Plains between 1862 and 1900, the region did not immediately prosper. Supplies were expensive, and the environment posed problems for farmers.

Some Chinese workers participated in a Fourth of July parade in Deadwood, South Dakota.



Scarce resources. Water was in short supply throughout much of the West. In parts of the Southwest, Hispanic and American Indian farmers had developed effective irrigation systems that used canals, dams, and sloping fields to control water flow. They established farms that fanned out in thin strips from water sources so that most community members had access to water. New settlers adopted these methods. The Great Plains also had few water sources. Many farmers had to travel several miles to a river or stream where they would fill large barrels and haul them back to the farm. Digging wells proved difficult and

time-consuming. One Nebraska farmer spent two years digging with a pick and shovel before reaching water 300 feet below the surface. Many settlers hired professional drillers who used drilling equipment developed by petroleum companies. Farmers also used new kinds of windmills to draw the water from their wells. These were wind-powered water pumps designed to withstand the region's strong winds.

Trees were another scarce resource on the Great Plains. Settlers developed clever solutions to cope with the lack of wood for fuel or building materials. Some burned dried buffalo manure, an excellent source of fuel. Settlers built **sod houses**, buildings made from chunks cut from the heavy topsoil that were stacked like bricks. A layer of soil covered the roof, which was made of a few scarce pieces of wood. Building with sod was difficult, however. A Kansas settler wrote, "The sod is heavy and when you take 3 or 4 bricks on a litter or hand barrow, and carry it 50 to 150 feet, I tell you it is no easy work."

Created in 1862, the **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)** helped farmers adapt to their new environment. USDA experts sought out and publicized new varieties of wheat suitable for the Great Plains. These new wheat crops replaced the grasses that had once covered the Great Plains. USDA agents also began teaching dry farming—new planting and harvesting techniques that conserved moisture. For example, agents advised farmers to plow deep furrows to bring moisture to the surface and to break up the soil after a rainfall to prevent evaporation.

New farming equipment. The development of new farming equipment also helped the Plains farmers. James Oliver's plow factory in South Bend, Indiana, produced thousands of plows with sharp, durable blades that could slice through the tough sod of the Plains. "Self-binding" harvesters not only cut wheat but also tied it into bundles. The combine cut wheat, separated it from the plant, and cleaned the grain all in one operation. Many of the new farming devices used steam-powered engines. However, the new technology plunged many small farmers into debt when they bought the equipment necessary to compete with larger landholders.

Efficient new farm machinery and cheap, abundant land enabled some companies to create a new kind of large-scale operation, the **bonanza farm**. Most bonanza farms were owned by large companies and operated like factories, with machinery, professional managers, and specialized laborers for different tasks. These large farms required from 500 to 1,000 extra workers at planting and harvesting times. Most owners divided their vast enterprises into small units, with a foreman in charge of each. Migrant workers, who were often unemployed cowboys possessing "nothing but small bundles containing a clean shirt and a few socks," performed much of the seasonal labor.

The era of bonanza farming soon faded. When weather conditions were favorable, bonanza farms produced large profits because of lower production costs. Because owners of bonanza farms bought seed and equipment in bulk, suppliers often gave them special deals. However, in times of severe drought or low wheat prices, bonanza farm profits fell. With fewer workers to pay and less money invested in equipment, family farmers could better handle boom-and-bust cycles. By the 1890s most bonanza farms had been broken up into smaller farms.



Windmills drew water from beneath the ground, allowing settlers to farm the Great Plains.

READING CHECK: Finding the Main Idea What technological innovations made farming profitable on the Great Plains?

The Western Novel

Several writers recognized the great beauty of the American West. Hamlin Garland, who as a boy hated farm life in Wisconsin, described the Great Plains in his 1899 novel, *Boy Life on the Prairie*. Mary Hallock Foote, an artist and writer who lived in California, described the western landscape in her 1894 short story, "A Cloud on the Mountain."

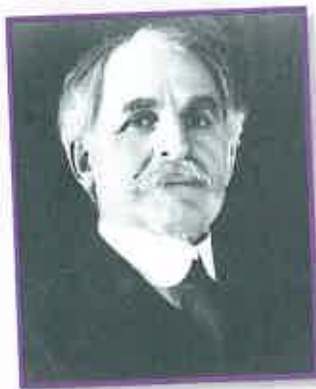
from *Boy Life on the Prairie* by Hamlin Garland

For a few days Lincoln and Owen had nothing to do but to keep the cattle from straying, and they seized the chance to become acquainted with the country round about. It burned deep into Lincoln's brain, this wide, sunny, windy country,—the sky was so big and the horizon line so low and so far away. The grasses and flowers were nearly all new to him. On the uplands the herbage [grasses] was short and dry and the plants stiff and woody, but in the swales the wild oat shook its quivers of barbed and twisted awrows, and the crow's-foot, tall and willowy, bowed softly under the feet of the wind, while everywhere in the lowlands, as well as on the sedges, the bleaching white antlers of monstrous elk lay scattered to testify of the swarming millions of wild cattle which once fed there.

To the south the settlement thickened, for in that direction lay the country town, but to the north and west the unclaimed prairie rolled, the feeding ground of the cattle, but the boys had little opportunity to explore that far. One day his father said:—

"Well, Lincoln, I guess you'll have to run the plough team this fall. I've got so much to do around the house, and we can't afford to hire."

This seemed a very fine and manly commission [task], and the boy drove his team out into the field one morning with vast pride.



Hamlin Garland

from "A Cloud on the Mountain" by Mary Hallock Foote

Ruth Mary . . . paused often in her work and looked towards the high pastures with the pale brown lights and purple shadows on them, rolling away and rising towards the great timbered ridges, and these lifting here and there along their profiles a treeless peak or bare divide into the regions above vegetation.

She had no misgivings about her home. Fences would not have improved her father's vast lawn, to her mind, or white paint the low-browed front of his dwelling; nor did she feel the want of a stair-carpet and a parlor-organ. She was sure that they, the strangers, had never seen anything more lovely than her beloved river dancing down between the hills, tripping over rapids, wrinkling over sand-bars of its own spreading, and letting out its speed down the long reaches where the channel was deep.



Mary Hallock Foote

UNDERSTANDING LITERATURE

1. Identify some of the words that each author uses to describe the landscape.
2. How did the geography described in the two excerpts differ?
3. Based on these passages, how did the two authors feel about the western landscape?

Farm Life on the Plains

Farm families on the Plains faced many problems for which inventors, manufacturers, and agricultural experts had no ready answers. Sod houses were well insulated, windproof, and fireproof. However, they were also damp and dirty. The roofs leaked and sometimes even collapsed in rainy weather. Many families hung a canopy inside the house to prevent dirt falling from the ceiling from landing on the dinner table. One Kansas settler who lived in a sod house described his mother's efforts to keep the house clean.



“[Sod houses] wet up when it rains, they dust off when it gets hot. Mama said she wasn't going to have neither, that she had brung a big roll of rag carpet . . . to cover the ceiling so's she could keep the dirt out of our victuals [food].”

—Kansas settler, quoted in *The Expansion of Everyday Life*, by Daniel Sutherland

Great Plains resident Luna Kellie remembered, “I had thought a sod house would be kind of nice, but the sight of the first one sickened me.”

Harsh weather and hard work. The climate of the Great Plains caused hardships for farming families. Winter on the Plains often brought blizzards and bone-chilling cold. The summer heat could be just as fierce. Settlers described droughts during which “the earth opened in great cracks several inches across and two feet deep.” There was no relief as “the leaves on the trees shriveled and dried up, and every living thing was seeking shelter from the hot rays of the sun.”

Insects also created problems on the Great Plains. In the 1870s farmers faced swarms of grasshoppers that devoured everything in their path, even the wooden handles of farming tools. Farmers killed thousands of the greedy insects to little effect. One homesteader moaned, “Two new grasshoppers arrived to attend each dead one's funeral.”

Settlers dreaded the raging fires that sometimes swept across the prairies. Most families sent someone onto the roof at night to search the horizon for signs of fire in the distance. Farmers soon learned to plow firebreaks—cleared areas with nothing to burn—around their houses and fields.

Even in good times, Plains farming demanded hard work from everyone in the family. Men did most of the heavy labor of building houses, fencing the land, and farming. In addition to household and child-rearing tasks, women often spent hours in the field. In 1878 a Kansas newspaper praised a local woman who “does her own plowing. . . . This year she has one hundred acres of fine wheat and will cut and bind it herself.” Another woman wrote home to her family in the East, explaining that she had been her husband's “sole help in getting up and stacking at least 25 tons of hay and oats.” Many farm wives also tended garden plots, preserved fruits and vegetables, and cared for farm animals.

Children had to do their share, too. Their chores included fetching water, tending gardens, and churning butter. One farmer described his two-year-old son, Baz, who could “run all over, fetch up cows out of the stock fields, or oxen, carry in stove wood and climb in the corn crib and feed the hogs and go on errands down to his grandma's.”



INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD

Home on the plains. Ruben Beatty and his wife posed for this photograph outside their home in Milton, South Dakota, in the late 1800s. **What does this photograph reveal about the home's construction?**

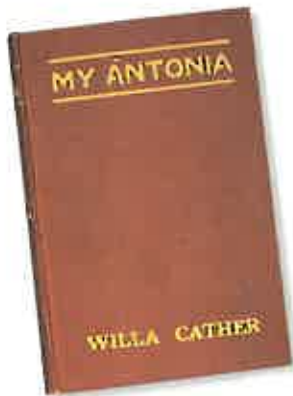
Harsh winter weather added to the difficulties of life on the Great Plains.



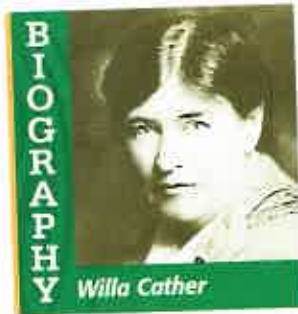
Research on the ROM

Free Find: Willa Cather

After reading about Willa Cather on the Holt Researcher CD-ROM, draw a picture of what you think her home on the Great Plains looked like. Include captions explaining the various elements in your drawing.



My Ántonia portrays prairie life.



Storytellers of the Plains. Western writers recorded stories about life on the Great Plains. Willa Cather, born in Virginia in 1873, was one such writer. As a young girl Cather traveled west with her family to a farm in Nebraska. Her grandparents had moved there several years earlier.

Although she was homesick for Virginia, Cather soon found Nebraska fascinating. "I think the first thing that interested me after I got to the homestead was a heavy hickory cane . . . which my grandmother always carried with her when she went to the garden to kill rattlesnakes," Cather wrote. "She had killed a good many snakes with it, and that seemed to argue that life might not be so flat as it looked there."

The Cather family soon moved to the nearby town of Red Cloud, where Willa attended high school. After graduating from the University of Nebraska, she taught high school in Pittsburgh and then took an editorial job at *McClure's Magazine* in New York. She turned to writing full-time in 1912. Cather published her first novel about life on the Plains, *O Pioneers!*, in 1913. In a 1925 interview she explained, "I write only of the Mid-Western American life that I know thoroughly." Cather's other novels—including *My Ántonia*, published in 1918, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, published in 1927—also examined life in the American West.

Although some settlers such as Cather were inspired by the West, difficulties overwhelmed many Plains farmers. Many were forced to abandon their farms. However, thousands stayed. They formed communities with churches and schools, newspapers and clubs, and even theaters and concert halls. Although harvests might be poor one year, there was always hope for better luck to come.

✓ **READING CHECK: Summarizing** Provide examples of three hardships that farmers on the Great Plains faced.

SECTION

2

REVIEW

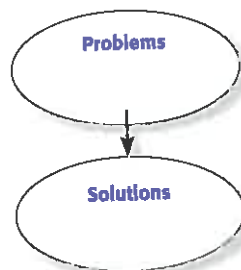
1. Define and explain:

sod houses
bonanza farm

2. Identify and explain:

Homestead Act
Pacific Railway Act
Morrill Act
Exodusters
Benjamin Singleton
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Willa Cather

3. **Summarizing** Copy the flowchart below. Use it to describe environmental problems that western farmers faced and how they attempted to solve those problems.



4. Finding the Main Idea

- How did the U.S. government promote economic development and assist farmers in the West?
- How did migration and immigration change settlement patterns in the West?
- How did the population growth in the West in the late 1800s affect its environment?

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

Identifying Points of View Imagine that you are on a wagon train migrating westward. Write a folk song that chronicles your experiences.

Consider:

- why most people moved west
- what their experiences were in the West
- what they gained and lost from the experience



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