

Historica Canada Education Portal

John Ware

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the John Ware biography from [The Canadians](#) series. John Ware remains a prominent figure in Canadian history. As a former slave from the American South who transplanted himself in Southern Alberta's range country, he triumphed over prejudice and discrimination to become a legend of the Canadian West.

Aims

Students will use the life of John Ware as a starting point to investigate several themes. The following activities focus on African-Canadian experiences, the myth and reality of the Canadian West, agricultural practices, and immigration.

Background

John Ware is a man who will never grow old. No matter where you may go in Alberta's range country, you'll hear someone mention John Ware – pioneer and rancher. John Ware was freed from slavery after the Civil War and was hired on a cattle drive from Texas to Idaho. From there he joined a cattle drive to the Bar U Ranch at High River. He soon became a

well-known rancher and owner of his own spread on Sheep Creek and the Red Deer River. John Ware was known for his skilled horsemanship and admired for his strength of character. People who knew him personally simply thought of him as a good neighbour.

His brand, 9999, was made famous through courage and hard work. He fought droughts, blizzards, wolves, storms, and rustlers. He was known to walk over the backs of penned steers without fear and exhibited superb horsemanship by taming the wildest broncos. His prodigious strength was demonstrated by stopping steers head-on and wrestling them to the ground. He would trip a horse by hand and hold it on its back to be shod, and he was known to lift an eighteen-month-old steer with apparent ease and throw it on its back for branding. The stories of his strength and courage go on and on.

John died in 1905 when his horse stumbled in a badger hole.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 - 4 hours

Procedures:

Ask your students to:

1. Write an obituary for John Ware as a tribute to his many successes. Instruct your students to refer to specific details and events in his life. Direct them to cut out current obituaries from the newspaper to use as examples. Be sure to include the names of his survivors and important predecessors, highlights of his life, cause of death and any other relevant

information. You might also want to include a photograph. (For examples of obituaries, refer to your local newspaper or go to [The Globe and Mail](#).)

2. Choose a character from the video.

- Ware's former slave owner
- Mildred Louis (Ware's wife)
- Lynch, the stockman who hired Ware
- A resident of Calgary
- A neighbour
- Janet or Robert Ware (Ware's children)
- John Ware himself

In small groups, create a dialogue that describes John Ware from the perspective of the selected character. Explain why your character feels this way. Assume the role of the character and present this dialogue to the class.

3. Create a time line of the key events in John Ware's life. Then investigate to see what other major events in North American history were taking place at that time and analyze how these major events had an impact on John Ware's life. Based on these events, ask students to assume the persona of Ware and write entries for a diary or journal of the adventures, experiences, and challenges he faced.

4. Write a short John Ware adventure story incorporating some facts from the video with fiction you create. You are writing historical fiction.

5. Cowboys are figures that today are often glorified. Divide the class in half, assigning each half the title 'Pro' or 'Con.' Instruct each side to independently brainstorm and create a list of the positive and negative

aspects of life as a cowboy. Facilitate a large group debate to determine whether the life of a cowboy is or ever was a desired career choice.

6. On a map of North America outline the approximate route John Ware travelled to get to Canada. Start with his place of birth, include the land he covered while driving cattle, and end with his final destination. To present a good visual display, use coloured pencils or string to outline his route.

7. Write the term "hero" on the board, form students into groups of 3 or 4. Now ask the groups to create a mind map by writing eight or ten features they associate with this term. Then create a mind map for John Ware. Be sure to include headings such as character and accomplishments. Use these two mind maps to assess the life and career of John Ware then conduct a class discussion to decide if John Ware is in fact a hero.

8. As a class listen to some music sung by cowboys during this period. In groups, determine if this reveals anything about the lifestyle of these cattlemen.

9. Have students create their own brands for a cattle herd. The brand must represent something about the student and his or her history.

10. Split the class into small groups. Some groups will create a poster advertising to immigrants about the availability of lands for homesteads in the Canadian West. The other groups will create a poster by ranchers that argues why homesteaders should not move into the territory. The class should then take on the roles of potential homesteaders, government officials, and ranchers to debate whether Canada's West should be opened up for farming.

11. Brainstorm what the students know about the "Wild West." The teacher could show clips from Western movies that play on the stereotypes about the "Wild West." Through research of primary sources, students could find out if Canada really had a "Wild West," and what it was really like. Students can then create a skit or video to share with the rest of the class to show an aspect of "Wild West" life.

12. Research one aspect of the experience of African-Canadians in Canadian history. Ideas could include Africville in Nova Scotia, the underground railway, and particular individuals. Students would then create bulletin board displays about the topic they researched in order to share the information they have gathered with other students.

13. Create a collection of current articles regarding ranching and agriculture. Use this information to see how agriculture and ranching practices and concerns have changed over time. For example, examine how disease among herds is controlled today, compared to how disease affected herds in the past.

Resources

[John Ware Worksheet](#)

[John Ware -The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[American Civil War - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Bar U Ranch - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

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Slides: National Museum of Man and National Film Board. "The Ranching Frontier in the Canadian West, 1874-1905." Distributed by McIntyre,

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National Film Board of Canada, *Land of Hope* Volume 1. 1996.