



Ethnic Studies Lesson 4I:

African American Cowboys and the Buffalo Soldiers

TOPIC:

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

1. Identity
2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

1. Cultivate empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially Native People/s and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).
2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem. (RI.11-12.7)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Analyze the contributions of African Americans to the economic and cultural development of the United States, including the role of Black cowboys and Buffalo Soldiers. (8.11)

Evaluate the impact of westward expansion, including the experiences of Native Americans, African Americans, and other minority groups. (8.8)

Lesson Purpose

Students will explore the history of Black cowboys and the Buffalo Soldiers in order to discover how they break down African American stereotypes. Students will also articulate how these two groups impacted the American culture and economy.

Essential Questions

How does studying Black cowboys and the Buffalo Soldiers help break down African American stereotypes? How did these groups add to the American culture and economy?

How has life changed for African Americans over the last 250 years?

Materials

[The Guardian: Why the first US cowboys were black](#)

[Smithsonian Magazine: The Lesser-Known History of African-American Cowboys](#)

[Blackpast: Black Cowboys in the 19th Century West \(1850-1900\)](#)

[Oklahoma Historical Society: Pickett, William \(ca. 1870-1932\)](#)

[Oklahoma Historical Society: Reeves, Bass \(1838-1910\)](#)

[Kansas Historical Society: Nat Love](#)

[National Park Service: Buffalo Soldiers—Service on the Frontier](#)

[Buffalo Soldiers National Museum](#)

[Unit 4 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

vaqueros

cowhands

cowboys

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, let the students know that as they've studied African Americans as individuals rather than stereotypes, and as they've studied the migration of African Americans moving from the deep South to the North and to the West, they probably won't be surprised to read about another stereotype-buster: Black cowboys. What do they already know about Black cowboys? Have they watched any recent popular shows such as the series about Bass Reeves?
- Have students watch [The Guardian: Why the first U.S. cowboys were black](#). As students watch, ask them to take notes about how learning about the regional history of Black cowboys can break down stereotypes. Also, they should ask how these Black cowboys contributed to the American culture and economy.

Step 2:

- Let students know they'll be creating a shared class poster about Black cowboys. Students will collect images and citation tags and will post their images on a bulletin board, digital poster, or classroom collage. Students may find images from other websites. This poster can be added to the gallery for breaking down African American stereotypes. Break students into the following groups:

- [Smithsonian Magazine: The Lesser-Known History of African-American Cowboys](#)
- [Blackpast: Black Cowboys in the 19th Century West \(1850-1900\)](#)
- [Oklahoma Historical Society: Pickett, William \(ca. 1870-1932\)](#)
- [Oklahoma Historical Society: Reeves, Bass \(1838-1910\)](#)
- [Kansas Historical Society: Nat Love](#)
- When students have completed their project and added their contributions to the class poster, ask student groups to describe their contributions.

Step 3:

- What do students know about the original Buffalo Soldiers? Have they heard the song by Bob Marley? Have students watch [National Park Service: Buffalo Soldiers—Service on the Frontier](#). As students watch, ask how researching Buffalo Soldiers breaks down stereotypes, and how these soldiers contributed to the national culture and economy. In what ways was their service complicated? (Answers could include serving in wars against American Indians, returning to a world with fewer rights, etc.) Let students know that Buffalo Soldiers have a proud past and have been involved in campaigns through World War II and the Korean conflict. Show students the [Buffalo Soldiers National Museum](#) in Houston Texas.

Step 4:

- Ask students this lesson's questions, "How does studying Black cowboys and the Buffalo Soldiers help break down African American stereotypes?" and "How did these groups add to the American culture and economy?" Also, ask this unit's question, "How has life changed for African Americans in the last 250 years?" Add what was learned to this unit's KWL chart.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

Consider adding this unit's poster/collage to the gallery on breaking down African American stereotypes before inviting outside classes or groups to visit the classroom.

Additional Readings and Resources

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 183-224.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 4A: KWL Chart

KNOW	WONDER	LEARNED
<i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i>	<i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i>	<i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i>