



## Primary Source Activity: The Oklahoma Land Rush

This lesson is designed as an extension to section 10 of chapter 10 of the TCI *Social Studies Alive!*, giving a “face” to the topic of the settling of the west during the Oklahoma land rush. These sources demonstrate the chaos that occurred during the land rush and the difference in experiences of some of the settlers. This extension provides an opportunity to compare and contrast those settlers’ experiences.

### Name of Primary Source

- Accounts and letters written by William Howard, E.W. Osburn, and Newton F. Locke.

### How primary source ties into text

- **Qualifies:** The primary sources included: accounts, letters, and photographs give this historical period of the Southwest region a face and “story” that the textbook sets up.
- **Elaborates:** The primary sources included provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the surroundings and activities during the Oklahoma land rush of 1889.
- **Raises questions:** Through these primary sources, the students are able to better answer such questions as:
  - What was the Oklahoma Land Rush like?
  - What were some of the experiences that the land settlers had?

### Colorado Standards

- 1995 History 2: Students know how to interpret and evaluate primary and secondary sources of historical information
- 2010 Social Studies Standard 1: History develops moral understandings, defines identity, and creates an appreciation of how things change while building skills in judgment and decision making. History enhances the ability to read varied sources and develop the skills to analyze, interpret, and communicate.
- Reading and Writing 1: Read and understand a variety of materials
- Reading and Writing 3: Write and speak using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

### Big Ideas

- The United States helped settle the west by offering settlers cheap public land.
- Describe the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889. (*Social Studies Alive!* Lesson Guide Unit 10.)
- Analyze images
- Read and respond to [primary sources] as a way to deepen comprehension and explore similarities and differences among stories, authors, and perspectives, (Grade 4: Unit 5: Lesson 20.).

### Critical thinking

- We have been given three passages written by William Howard, E.W. Osburn, and Newton F. Locke. What were their experiences and how were they alike and different from each other?
- What was the Oklahoma Land Rush and why was it so significant?

## Teaching

Begin by reviewing the definition of a land rush. Read section 10 of chapter 10 in the *Social Studies Alive!* text.

## Active Engagement

Divide the class into groups, assigning each group a passage from one of the settlers. Display the photos of the land rush as the students read the passages by William Howard, E.W. Osburn, and Newton F. Locke. Have the students discuss in groups what the ‘boomers’ must have seen as they rushed on to claim their land.

Have the students take notes on the graphic organizer: **Supporting Details Web**.

Compare and contrast the information that each person chose to record different events or information. As a class, create a three-way Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the experiences of the settlers. Ask them to choose two authors and discuss with a partner why each person chose those particular events and information to record. Record this information on the **Three-Way Venn Diagram** master.

Postcards: Make copies of the photos onto card stock so that they are approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  the size of a regular sheet of paper and hand out the postcards to the students. See **Postcard Directions and Postcard Blank**. Have the students write a note home telling the most exciting or the worst experience of their trip. Make sure that they include information about the land they settled. Have the students decorate the front of the postcard to show their new land or even an event that occurred during their attempt at acquiring their “free land.”

## **“The Rush to Oklahoma” by William W. Howard**

As the expectant home-seekers wait with restless patience, the clear, sweet notes of a cavalry bugle rose and hung a moment upon the startled air. It was noon... Each driver lashed his horse furiously; each rider dug his spurs into his willing steed, and each man on foot caught his breath hard and darted forward. A cloud of dust rose where the home-seekers had stood in line, and when it had drifted away before the gentle breeze, the horses and wagons and men were tearing across the open country like fiends.

Some of the men who started from the line on foot were quite successful in securing desirable claims as many who rode fleet horses. They had the advantage of knowing just where their land was located. One man left the line with the others, carrying on his back a tent, a blanket, some camp dishes, an axe, and provisions for two days. He ran down the railway track for six miles, and reached his claim in just sixty minutes. Upon arriving on his land he fell down under a tree, unable to speak or see. I am glad to be able to say that his claim is one of the best in Oklahoma. The rush from the line was so impetuous that by the time the first railway train arrived from the north at twenty-five minutes past twelve o'clock, only a few of the hundreds of boomers were anywhere to be seen.

The journey of this first train was well-nigh as interesting as the rush of the men in wagons. The train left Arkansas City at 8:45 o'clock in the forenoon. It consisted of an empty baggage car, which was set apart for the use of the newspaper correspondents, eight passenger coaches, and the caboose of a freight train. The coaches were so densely packed with men that not another human being could get on board....

This way the train was loaded to its utmost capacity. That no one was killed or injured was due as much to the careful management of the train as to the ability of the passengers to take care of themselves. Like their friends in the wagons, the boomers on the cars were exultant with joy at the thought of at last entering into possession of the promised land....

Hardly had the train slackened its speed when the impatient boomers began to leap from the cars and run up the slope. Men jumped from the roofs of the moving cars at the risk of their lives. Some were so stunned by the fall that they could not get up for some minutes.

Source: *Harper's Weekly*, vol. 33 (May 18, 1889), pp. 391-394.

## “The Rush from Texas” by Newton F. Locke

November 5, 1893

Dear Tom,

When the 18<sup>th</sup> arrived we had our 5 race horses in fine fix, went out to the line and took our places about one hour before starting with twenty thousand people. The line at our point was 14 miles long and at 12 o'clock when the signal sounded, the ground start was made, I looked down the line for an instant and it appeared like a huge serpent moving, it was the most people I ever saw together. The crowd was composed of all nationalities. All classes of men from the gray haired Grandfather to the boy of 12 years, dudes, school mamas [sic], bicyclists, and the train with 33 cars and 3 engines was all in the start. You can amainge[sic] how I feel mounted on a Texas horse my chances were certainly very few. However myself and comrades rode on together at our usual Texas gate for about 7 mile [sic] until we got out horse well heated and covered with foam and as fast as we could. Not to hurt our horses. We then began to get faster, faster, and faster and ere long were passing the multitude very rapidly. Still we rode on recklessly. Finally we came in sight of the US Land Office at the town site of Enid, our destination. We arrived in among say 30 people the first to get there. We had made a fine race and were proud of it. We had beat every thing there ex-Western [sic] horses. Kentucky and Missouri race horses not excepted. We made the 18 mile heat in 48 minutes. Not a bad saddle horse time and that too without hurting any of our five horses. I was No. 1 to file in the land office. It was an exciting trip and I enjoyed it very much. I went over the route the next day to get our wagon and other horses and could trace the route by dead horses broken buggies and wagons. Some of the prettiest horses I ever saw lay dead. Naturally run to death by not knowing how to ride them. Several people killed and several badly mashed up.

As ever your brother,  
Newt

Source: Oklahoma Historical Society

## **“From Kansas to Oklahoma” Diary of E. W. Osburn**

Monday, April 22, 1889

“Camp Gertrude. All hands anxious and ready for the move. Boomer wagons are clicking all around. Trains of six to twenty wagons are moving west just south of us. Some wagons are camped south, some are moving back north. Beautiful morning. The men are now making a crossing at the little stream, ready for the move in case we are not ordered back. We all expect a race. Left out camp for the drive at 11:50 A.M. Such a pel mel race. We reached the main trail ahead of the main rank. Signal had been given by firing of guns along the line. When we had reached the top of the ridge, standing on the top of Mr. Boon’s wagon I saw probably 2,000 wagons - trains five to eight miles in length, hundreds of horsemen in a dead run. Carts, buggies, light wagons. Everything at break neck speed. Drove some eighteen miles in one hour and fifty minutes. One buggy and a few horsemen passed up [sic] - when we reached Ephraim, corralled the horses and the crowd broke for the Cimarron bottoms. Four secured claims. I stayed with the wagons. In less that one hour seventy-one (railroad) cars crowded passed from the north. On the platforms, coal tinder, on top of cars. Men jumped from the train and said “my claim.” Although first from the line we found the best claims taken. Cowboys, etc., were hid and came up like boys from a spring board. Some dared [sic] they made the trip in 15 or 20 minutes. One man was found on a claim who had a wagon, cow and calf, colt etc. ready to plant corn who stated that he made the trip in 20 minutes from the line - 18 miles. The racing continued all day - the air was fogged with dirt. Started back to Camp Gertrude at sundown but did not get in until one the next morning having lost our way on the prairie. The country traversed is mostly high or broken ground. There is much firm, rich land. Splendid scenery.”

Saturday, April 27, 1889

“Took fair start just before noon. One wheel of our cart broke smake in twain [sic]. Then we tried to get wire off the passers by but failed. One man had six cows leading - one to each horse - one on each side of the wagon - 2? We finally walked up to the wire fence [sic]. Oklahoma and Cherokee line - got some wire - patched up and on we came. One of us had to walk. Camped on Skelton (River). This all a barren waste, sure. Passed one old ranch which had been standing 25 or 30 years - built of longs two rows deep standing on end.”

Sunday, April 28, 1889

“Our camp is a bad one, cold and little grass. Concluded to move on to Pond Creek. I walked most of the way - twenty-one miles. At the Salt Fork we saw one of the hardest crowds - two wagons, one had hitched to it five cows, two bulls, one steer, big hay racks for beds and loaded with all sorts of plunder. Camped a little after noon on Pond Creek. Fine place.”

Monday, April 29, 1889

“Pond Creek. Last night had heavy wind and rain storm. Had to get up in the night and dress. Started for Caldwell, Kansas. Commenced raining soon after starting, walked most of the way. Got drenching wet and cold, put up at a livery stable. Slept in the hay mow. Went to the Rock Island lumber yard. Poured the water out of our boots, dried our clothes. Had the cart wheel welded. Heavy storm - rain, wind. 26 miles from Pond Creek to Caldwell.”

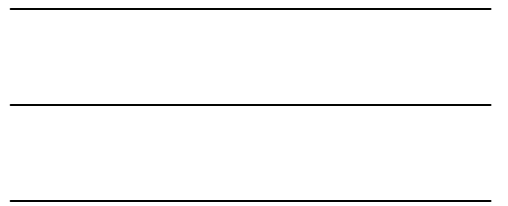
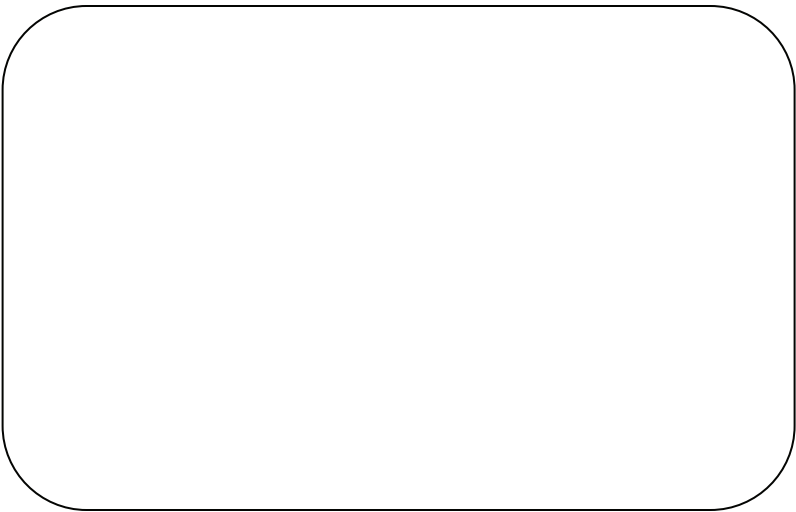
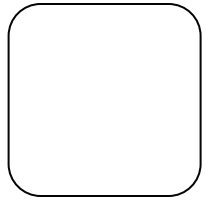
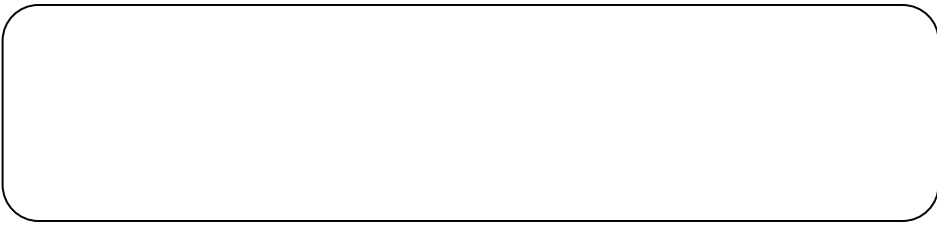
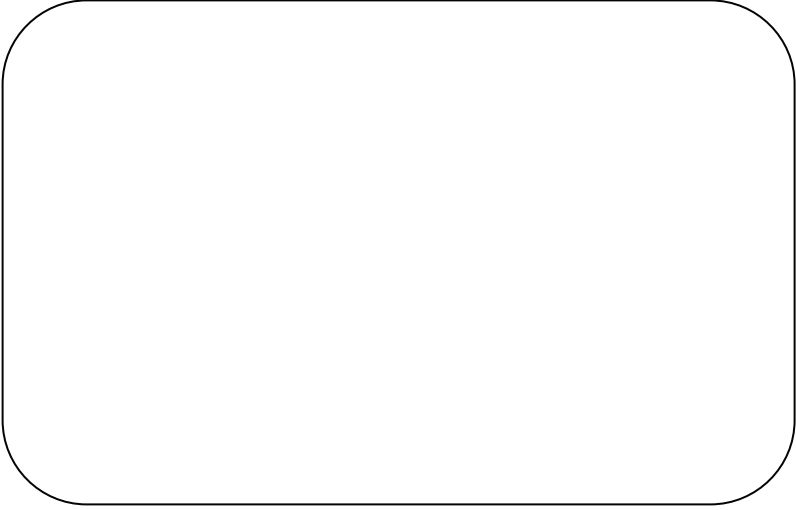
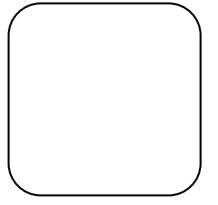
Tuesday, April 30, 1889

“Went directly north from Caldwell until we reached the Chikaskia. Then west to Milan. The north to Ninnescah, where we had to go five miles east to cross the river. Camped 7 ½ miles from crossing of Ninnescah.”

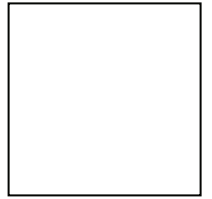
Wednesday, May 1, 1889

“Made trip of fifty some miles and reached home 10:30 P.M.”

Source: Oklahoma Historical Society.



\*Caption of the photo on the front of your postcard. Be sure to provide details.



Design your own  
stamp so that you can  
mail your postcard.

\* This is the message you want to send.  
(This should be about your experiences in the land rush.)

---

---

---

Name and address of the  
person that you are sending  
the card to.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Supporting Details Web

Who

An empty oval shape intended for writing details about the settlers.

When

An empty oval shape intended for writing details about the time of settlement.

Where

(Where the settlers came from)

An empty oval shape intended for writing details about the location of the settlers.

What

A large empty oval shape intended for writing the main details of the settlers' story.

Why

(Why did the settlers want the land ?)

An empty oval shape intended for writing details about the reasons for settlement.

How

(How was the settlers' experience?)

An empty oval shape intended for writing details about the settlers' experiences.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Triple Venn Diagram

