



# WESTWARD EXPANSION

## THE AMERICAN INDIAN EXPERIENCE

**GRADE LEVEL:** 5–8**SUBJECT:** Social Sciences**DURATION:** Three 40-minute class periods**NATIONAL STANDARD:** Social Science, US History, ERA 4: Expansion and reform**MATERIALS:** Reference materials about American Indian tribes, history, and culture*Use this lesson to have students reflect on the American Indian experience during Western Expansion.*

### DESCRIPTION

Stanley's great grandfather, Stanley Yelnats – the first of the Stanley Yelnatses (son of the no-good dirty-rotten pig stealer) – lost his fortune while attempting to move west from New York to California. His journey was cut short when his stagecoach was robbed by Kissing Kate, and Stanley settled in Texas instead of California.

Stanley Yelnats' journey west was typical of the 1800s, the period of Western Expansion in the United States. Westward Expansion was a time when many people envisioned the western United States as a land of opportunity and prosperity – even gold. It was a time of pioneer heroism, adventure, and outlaws. The period of Westward Expansion was also a time of great loss for American Indians who were driven from their land and forced to live on designated parcels of land called reservations.

### OBJECTIVES

- To understand United States Westward Expansion and how it affected relations with American Indians
- To reflect on the American Indian experience of Westward Expansion

### ADAPTATIONS

Younger students should focus on increased awareness of American Indian tribes. Divide up tribes representative of the Southwest, Southeast, Northeast, Great Plains and Northwest and ask students to research and write short reports on a single tribe as assigned by the teacher.

### ASSESSMENT

Design a five-point rubric to assess students on identifying important elements of their research topic and presenting those elements in a brief presentation.

### EXTENSIONS

Ask students to use the phone books and/or Internet to find out if there is an American Indian reservation or American Indian organization in or near their community. Find out if the organization has a speaker's bureau. Invite a speaker to class. Help students prepare ahead of time for the guest by researching the visitor's tribe and history, and formulating questions prior to his or her visit.

### USEFUL RESOURCES

National Museum of the American Indian web site: [www.nmai.si.edu](http://www.nmai.si.edu)

Internet resources for students and lesson plans/activities related to American Indians: <http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/web/natam.html>

General view of the history of the American West: [www.americanwest.com](http://www.americanwest.com)



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## THE AMERICAN INDIAN EXPERIENCE

### PROCEDURES

1. Review with students the motivating factors for Westward Expansion – wealth, land, and adventure. Ranchers, farmers, merchants, and miners, among others, made the move west. During the 1840s, the United States acquired Texas, California, and the Southwest. After the U.S. Civil War in the 1860's, the migration west accelerated, and the U.S. Army focused its military resources in that direction as well. As more and more whites settled in the west, the United States government demanded that American Indians move to reservations, removing tribes from land rich in gold, silver, timber, and oil. On the reservations, American Indians were forced to live by the whites' laws and customs, and to speak English. Some American Indian tribes fought to maintain their tribal integrity and independence and resisted being forced onto reservation land. The Cheyenne, Sioux, Comanche, Kiowa, Apache, Arapaho and Nez Percé were some of the tribes who fought the most dramatically to resist reservation life.
2. Present to students some of the expectations, thoughts, and reasons for putting American Indians on reservations, some of which we would now classify as blatantly racist, including:
  - To teach American Indians to farm and “value” property
  - To “civilize” American Indians through education
  - To teach American Indians the Christian religion
  - To teach American Indians English
  - To remove “obstacles” to the exploitation of natural resources
  - To keep settlers safe from “savage” attacks and
  - To ensure separate living space and reduce chances of “interbreeding”
3. Stimulate discussion about why American Indians might have resisted moving to reservation land, and why they might not have wanted to live by the whites' rules and customs. Why might the whites' goals for American Indians have been offensive to the American Indians?
4. Discuss what options there were for those American Indians who did not want to live on reservations. Some American Indians agreed to live on reservations; others fought long brutal battles in defense of their land, and their people's ways. Some American Indians agreed to live on reservation land by making promises with the U.S. government that they would be left alone, and allowed to practice their language and culture. The government often broke these promises and battles ensued.
5. Instruct students to choose one of the following topics to research and present in a five-minute oral presentation in class. Suggested research topics: Chief Joseph, Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Trail of Tears, Wounded Knee Massacre, Battle of Little Big Horn, Ghost Dance religion, and various American Indian tribes. You may choose to ask students to focus less on topical research. Instead, you could ask them to respond to an “essential question” about development, supported by facts and examples from what they learn of the American Indian experience of the last half of the 1800s. An example of such a question could be, “Were American Indians who chose to fight back or resist with arms ever justified in doing so? Why or why not?”