

Potato Brands

Wyoming Social Studies, Language Arts

Objectives:

- Student will learn the history and purpose of branding.

Background:

Ranchers in the American West branded their cattle to keep cattle rustler from stealing them. If the cattle were stolen, the brand would prove who the real owner was. Since there were no fences on the American Plains in those days, branding was a good way for rancher to know their own cattle from those of other ranchers.

In Texas, there was at least one rancher named Sam Maverick, who didn't like to brand his cattle. Many of his cattle were stolen or simply wandered away. Since they didn't have a brand and no one knew who owned them, the unbranded cattle became known as mavericks.

Ranchers today still brand their cattle to protect them from rustlers. Fences keep one rancher's cattle separated from another's now, but brands help identify them in case they get outside the fence or mingle with another herd.

A rancher must register his or her brand in the state where he or she first started using it. A brand is considered property and can be inherited or passed down in a family.

A ranch can have more than one brand, but they must all be registered. The location of the brand on the animal's body will be the same for every animal that belongs to that ranch. It may be on the animal's hind quarters, shoulder or side. The brand never disappears and can even be seen on the hide after the animal is butchered.

Branding irons are formed from steel and placed on long handles. The branding iron is heated until it turns an ash color. It is then pressed into the hide of the calf long enough to burn through the hair and the outer layer of skin. Some modern branding irons are electric with plastic grips.

Activity Procedure:

1. Explain the purpose of cattle brands and illustrate examples on the board. These might include: x-x or and R rolled on it side that could be a Lazy R, a S with a line over it could be the "Bar S." (See page 3 for other examples.)
2. Have students design their own brand and give it a name.
3. Distribute potatoes, plastic knives, spoons, and cardstock paper. Explain the activity. *Optional Variation:* A sponge can be used instead of the potato.



Standards

Social Studies

Production, Consumption, & Distribution: 3.1

Time, Continuity, & Change: 4.2

Language Arts

Speaking & Listening: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3., 3.5,

Materials

- cardstock paper
- potatoes cut into halves
- paint (water based)
- spoons and plastic knives

Estimated Time

60 Minutes

Grades 1-2

notes:

- Have students trace their design onto the potato half. (Be sure that all the lines are fairly thick.)
 - Carefully cut out the design and gently dry the potato.
 - Ink the potato by dipping the potato in paint.
 - Press the inked potato on a clean piece of cardstock paper for a print of the brand.
4. **(PART 2)** Have students each make a few prints of their brand and exchange them with other students.
 5. Explain the term cattle rustler and show an example of how a rustler might alter a brand. Stress, that the new brands must mean something.
 6. Challenge the students to change other's brands by adding lines or curves in a similar way. Caution them: Be careful many rustlers were caught or hung for altering people's brands.
 7. Each student can share with the class their new brand and why they chose its design.

Questions for Investigation:

- Students can write their names on their own and rustled brands and turn them in.
- As an added evaluation activity, have students write a short explanation of why ranchers brand their cattle.



The practice of branding has been traced back to ancient Egypt. It was brought to North America by the Spanish. In Mexico brands could be quite elaborate. In the United States, brands are composed of letters, squares, diamonds, slashes, bars, and other symbols, all in different compositions and placements.

W

Q

T

S

Registrations are required to be renewed in years ending in 5, i.e. 1995, 2005, etc. With approximately 28,000 brands in Wyoming a necessity. Brand Books are issued every ten years with periodic supplements. The books show first, a picture of the brand, secondly, a diagram of any ear marks, and the name and address of the owner of the brand.

R

R

R

R

R

R

Block R

Running R

Walking R

Crazy R

Tumbling R

Lazy R

R

R

R

R

R

R

Bar R

R Bar

Circle R

Box R

Diamond R

Rocking R

