



#### 4th Grade Grand Prize Winner

“Moo-ving” Cattle to the North: The History of Texas Cattle Drives

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## “Moo-ving” Cattle to the North: The History of Texas Cattle Drives

The Texas cattle drives of the late 1800s impacted the Texas economy and culture. Cattle ranching in Texas began in the sixteenth century when it spread through Spanish Mexico to what is now Texas. The first cattle drives were used to provide beef to soldiers during the American Revolution. By the 1830s, Texas had an abundance of land and cattle, and longhorns and ranches had become an important part of the Texas economy. There was a big demand for beef in the Northeast after the Civil War. Texas ranchers had more than enough, but they had no way of shipping the cattle to meet that demand. Cattle owners in Texas quickly came up with a plan to solve this problem and earn some money. The cattle drives gave the ranchers the opportunity to get their cattle to the nearest railroads.

Life on the cattle drives was tough and dangerous. About twelve cowboys could move 2,000 to 3,000 cattle about ten to fifteen miles a day on the long trip to western Kansas. The drovers and wranglers had to survive through harsh weather, cattle thieves, stampedes, and difficult living conditions. The drovers rode horseback on both sides of the herd, and the pointers worked at the front of the herd. They communicated using hand signals and hat gestures. The cook rode up ahead of the group in the chuckwagon and prepared meals. Mostly they ate beans, biscuits, and pork. Sometimes they ate “son of a gun” stew made from cow brain, heart, liver, kidney, and tongue.

The Chisholm Trail and the Western Trail were two of the most popular trails to travel on during the Texas cattle drives. The businessman Joseph McCoy worked with the Kansas Pacific Railroad to build holding pens in Abilene, Kansas. The most important trail from Texas to Abilene was the Chisholm Trail. More than 1.5 million cattle were driven along the Chisholm Trail to Abilene. Soon after that Texas ranchers needed a brand new trail farther west. In 1874 the Western Trail was created, and it became the main cattle drive trail by 1879. Some ranchers decided they could get money by getting cattle to military posts and mining camps. Two of these ranchers were Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving. They created a route known as the Goodnight Loving Trail that went across West Texas and New Mexico and into Colorado.

Although successful for two decades, the popularity of cattle drives eventually came to an end. Once railroads made it to Texas, there was no need for cattle drives. We still see the influence of the ol’ Texas cattle drives in the Fort Worth Stockyards, the state fair with “Big Tex”, and livestock shows and rodeos across Texas.