

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

INTRODUCTION – The Autry Museum of the American West is a museum located in Griffith Park in Los Angeles, California. The Autry Museum tells stories about the diverse peoples of the American West. In this lesson, you will learn about vaqueros. *Vaquero* is a Spanish word for cowboy. Cowboys do many things. What do you think cowboys do? Write what you think cowboys do in the space below or on a separate document.

I think that cowboys _____

Many people think of cowboys as heroes who save the day like in **Western** movies, books, or radio and television programs. Cowboys are actually real people who have real jobs. Cowboys have been, and continue to be, an important part of the West. Vaqueros were the first cowboys. Vaquero **culture** in North America goes back as far as the 1680s. This was a time when the **population** was much smaller, and life was much different.

Look closely at this image of a vaquero from the Autry Museum. What do you notice about the vaquero in this image? Describe what you notice in the space below or on a separate document.



One thing that I notice about the vaquero in the image is _____

Another thing that I notice about the vaquero in the image is _____

Glossary

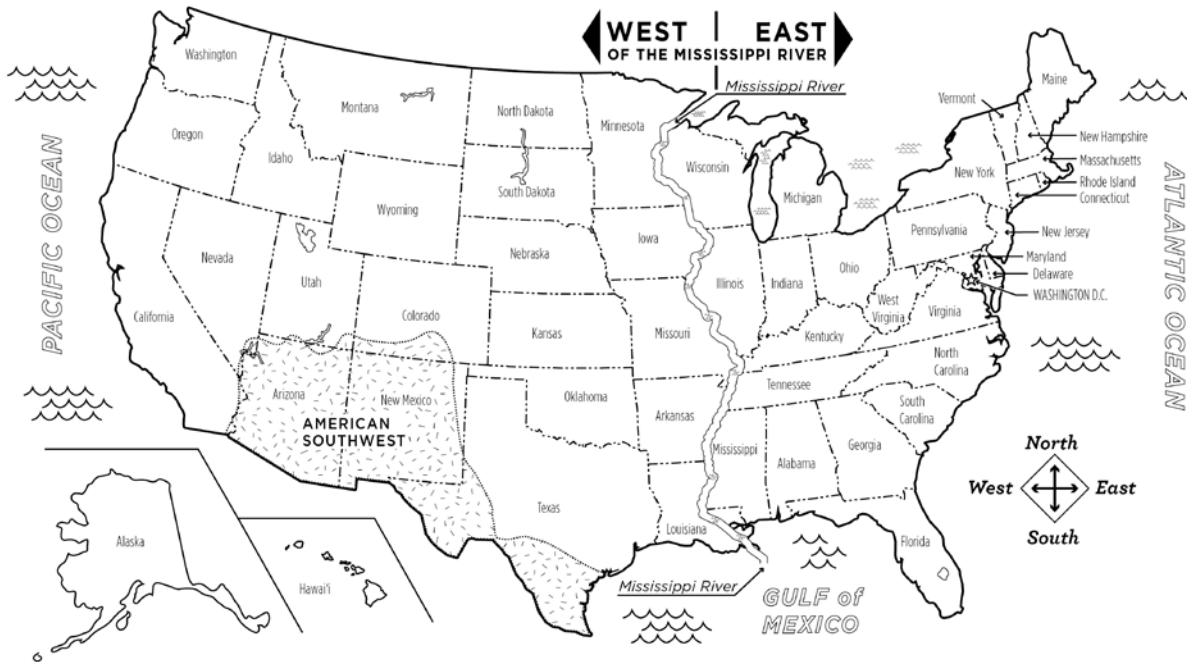
Culture: a way of life for a group of people including their beliefs, customs, and traditions

Population: the number of people living in an area

Western: books, movies, and television and radio shows about the West that often involve cowboys

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 1 – Vaqueros were the first cowboys in what is now the American Southwest. Learn more about where the American Southwest is located by looking at the United States map and by following the directions underneath it.



The location of the American Southwest that is depicted on this map is an approximation.

Where is the American Southwest located? Find some colored pencils, crayons, or markers. Then follow the directions below to find out where the American Southwest is located.

- A) The American Southwest is west (to the left) of the Atlantic Ocean. Find the Atlantic Ocean. **Color it blue.**
- B) The American Southwest is northwest (up/to the left) of the Gulf of Mexico. Find the Gulf of Mexico. **Color it blue.**
- C) The American Southwest is west (to the left) of the Mississippi River. Find the Mississippi River. **Color it blue.**
- D) The American Southwest is east (to the right) of the Pacific Ocean. Find the Pacific Ocean. **Color it blue.**
- E) Arizona is part of the American Southwest. **Color it red.**
- F) California is part of the American Southwest. **Color it orange.**
- G) Colorado is part of the American Southwest. **Color it yellow.**
- H) Nevada is part of the American Southwest. **Color it green.**
- I) New Mexico is part of the American Southwest. **Color it purple.**
- J) Texas is part of the American Southwest. **Color it pink.**
- K) Utah is part of the American Southwest. **Color it grey.**

Congratulations—you have found the American Southwest! The American Southwest includes parts of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah. Now that you know where the American Southwest is located, let’s learn more about who vaqueros were, what they did, and the skills, tools, and vocabulary that they used.

Glossary

Skills: the ability to do something that comes from training, experience, or practice

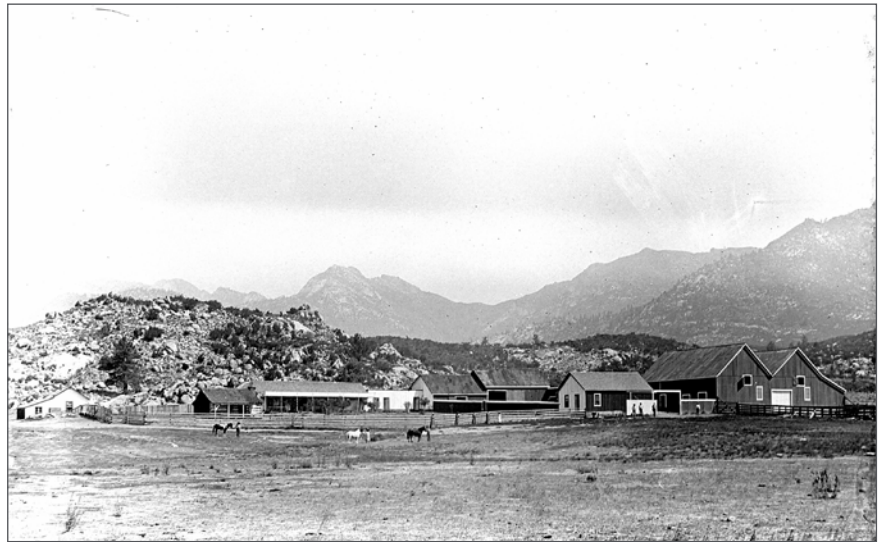
Vocabulary: the words that people use

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 2 – Who were vaqueros? Vaqueros were African, Mexican, Native American, and Spanish men. The vaquero way of life started in a European country called Spain. In the 1500s, the Spanish explored and began settling in the **Americas**. They brought animals such as cattle and horses with them and built ranches. Ranches are places where people raise animals. Vaqueros worked on many of these ranches. The vaquero way of life eventually made its way to Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas, which were all a part of northern Mexico at the time.

Some vaqueros were **hired** to work on the ranches while other vaqueros were forced to work for the ranches. Many Native Americans were forced to work on missions in different places such as California. The Spanish built missions with buildings, churches, and ranches on land that Native American communities had been living on for thousands of years. The Spanish did this to control land, to spread religion and Spanish culture, and for **agriculture**. A number of the Native American people who worked for the missions were vaqueros. Despite the harsh and unfair conditions, Native American people became **skilled** vaqueros. Some Native Americans were still forced to work on ranches after the missions ended. African people also became vaqueros. Many **enslaved** Africans who were brought to North America by the Spanish were forced to work on ranches.

In the 1800s, the land that Spain once controlled was taken over by Mexico and then by the United States. During this time, more and more ranches were built. A lot of vaqueros worked on these ranches. Look closely at this image of a California ranch from the Autry Museum.



What do you see in this image?
Describe what you see in the space below or on a separate document.

I see _____

Glossary

Agriculture: growing crops and raising farm animals

Americas: North America and South America

Enslaved: a person who is owned by another person and is forced to work without pay or rights; a slave

Hired: to give work or a job to someone in exchange for wages or a salary

Skilled: having the training, knowledge, and experience that is needed to do something; having a lot of skill

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PART 3 – What kinds of animals were raised on ranches? Animals such as cattle and horses were raised on ranches. Look closely at this painting that the Autry Museum borrowed from the California Historical Society Collections.



What do you think cattle were used for? Describe what you think cattle were used for in the space below or on a separate document.

I think cattle were used for _____

Cattle were used for many things. They were raised on ranches so that their **hides**, meat, and **tallow** could be used. The hides could be used to make **leather**. Items like soap and candles were made from tallow. People also ate their meat called beef. In the mid-1800s, thousands of people came to California from other countries and different parts of the United States to look for gold or to work during the California Gold Rush. This increase in the number of people in California caused a **demand** for beef.

Glossary

Demand: a strong need for something

Hides: animal skin

Leather: a material made from animal skin

Tallow: fat from animals such as cattle

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PART 4A – What did vaqueros do? A vaquero’s job was very difficult. Vaqueros worked long, hard days outside. Sometimes they worked in harsh weather that was extremely cold, hot, or wet. The vaqueros who were forced to work didn’t receive pay for the work that they did. Even the vaqueros who were hired received very little pay for their work.

Vaqueros did a wide range of things on ranches. A vaquero’s main responsibility was to take care of animals such as cattle and horses by keeping track of them, by making sure that they stayed healthy, and by keeping them safe from wild animals. Vaqueros moved animals to pastures or areas with small plants such as grass. The animals could eat plants, drink water, and get exercise in the pastures.

Vaqueros also branded animals using a metal tool called a branding iron. Look closely at this image of a branding iron from the Autry Museum.



What do you think a branding iron was used for? Describe what you think a branding iron was used for in the space below or on a separate document.

I think a branding iron was used for _____

Vaqueros used branding irons to mark animals. A heated branding iron burned a mark onto the animal’s hide. The mark often **represented** the animal’s owner. If someone found a lost animal with a brand mark on it, they could find out who owned the animal by looking at the mark.

Glossary

Represented: served as a sign or symbol of something

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PART 4B – What else did vaqueros do? Vaqueros also participated in cattle drives. Look closely at this image of a cattle drive from the Autry Museum.



What do you think a cattle drive is? Describe what you think a cattle drive is based on what you see in the image. Write your answer in the space below or on a separate document.

I think a cattle drive is _____

A cattle drive is when cattle are moved from one place to another place along a cattle trail. Vaqueros took care of the animals along the cattle trails. Cattle were moved along the cattle trails so that they could be taken to or sold to other places. At first, the vaqueros **drove** the cattle between Mexico City, Mexico and New Mexico. Later, they moved the cattle between Mexico City, Mexico and Texas. Once the vaqueros started driving the cattle between Texas and different areas north of Texas, many of the Native American vaqueros came from communities such as the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Pawnee, and Seminole.

In addition to taking care of animals on ranches and along the cattle trails, vaqueros were responsible for other tasks like fixing things and **processing** hides and tallow. A vaquero's job was a lot of work.

Glossary

Drove: to move a group of animals together

Processing: following steps or actions to do or make something

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 5 – What kinds of skills did vaqueros need to do their job? Look closely at this image of a vaquero again to find out about a skill that vaqueros needed to do their job.



What is the vaquero doing in this image? Describe what the vaquero is doing in the space below or on a separate document.

The vaquero in this image is _____

Riding, **herding**, and **roping** were important skills that vaqueros used to do their job. Riding horses, like the vaquero in the image above, was an important part of a vaquero's job. They rode horses so that they could work with the other animals. Herding animals to make sure that the animals stayed together in one group was another part of a vaquero's job. They even used ropes to catch and control animals. Vaqueros shared their riding and roping skills with others during competitions at events called roundups or rodeos. Vaqueros used a lot of different skills to do their job.

Glossary

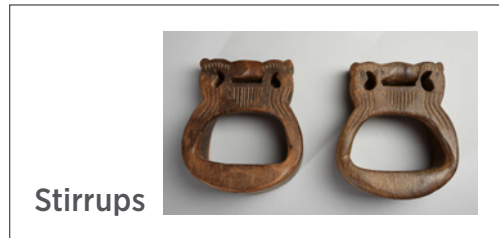
Herding: gathering and moving a group of animals

Roping: using rope to catch animals

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 6 – What tools did vaqueros use? In addition to using branding irons, vaqueros used many other tools to help them do their job. Learn more about some of the different tools that vaqueros used by completing a matching activity. Look at the images of tools from the Autry Museum on the left-hand side. Read the descriptions on the right-hand side. In the space below, match the tools on the left-hand side with the correct descriptions on the right-hand side.

Tools



Descriptions

This tool is a short whip made of rawhide. It was used to get a cow's attention.

This tool made of leather was placed on a horse's back to make both the rider and the horse more comfortable during horse-back riding.

This tool is a throwing rope made of rawhide. It is a long rope that was thrown to catch animals.

This tool is a pair of wooden loops that attach to a saddle. They were used to support the rider's feet.

This tool was worn on the heel of a boot to nudge and direct a horse while riding it. This tool is made of metal and has points called spokes.

Glossary

Rawhide: cattle skin before it has been made into leather

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 7 – What vocabulary did vaqueros use? Vaquero words mostly came from Spanish words. Learn more about different vaquero words by reading the words, where they came from, and their meanings. Then circle the vaquero words that you have used before in the space below or write them on a separate document.

Bravo: brave, wild, fierce

Bronco: wild or unbroken horse, alternative term for “mustang”

Canyon: from cañón; a steep-sided valley, gorge, ravine

Chaparral: from chaparra; unruly shrubs or brush

Chaps: also called chaparreras, leather leggings worn by cowboys over pants

Corral: an enclosure for livestock and horses; to round up livestock and horses

Lariat: from la reata, a rope with a loop at one end used to catch and tether livestock

Lasso: a long rope with an adjustable loop at one end used to catch livestock

Mustang: a wild horse; horses brought to North America by Spanish settlers

Pinto: from pintar, meaning “to paint”; can refer to a spotted horse or a spotted variety of bean

Poncho: a blanket with an opening in the middle for the head to fit through, covering the shoulders, chest, and back

Quirt: from cuarta; a short-handled riding whip

Ranch: also rancho, could include a cattle-breeding outfit, any structure along the trails; to raise livestock

Rodeo: from rodear, meaning “to surround” or “to encircle”; can refer to either a roundup or a competition in which cowboys test their skills at roping, riding, and throwing cattle

Stampede: from estampar, meaning “to crush” or “to mash”; a group of livestock suddenly running off

Vaquero: from vaca, meaning “cow,” and -ero, meaning “profession” or “trade”; a herder of cattle

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 8 – Vaqueros were one of the many groups of people that shaped ranching in the West. Some of the vaquero skills, tools, and vocabulary were also used by the African American, Native American, and white cowboys that vaqueros worked alongside. Many of these vaquero skills, tools, and vocabulary are still used today. Look closely at this image from the Autry Museum of a cowboy on a ranch in California in approximately 1975.



What vaquero skills, tools, and vocabulary are represented in this image? Write the vaquero skills, tools, and vocabulary that are represented in this image in the space below or on a separate document.

The vaquero skills that the cowboy in the image is using include _____

The vaquero tools that the cowboy in the image is using include _____

The things that represent vaquero vocabulary in the image include _____

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 9 – Using what you have learned throughout this lesson, write a paragraph about vaqueros. Plan your paragraph before writing it by answering the questions in the chart below. Write detailed answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

| PARAGRAPH PLAN QUESTIONS | MY PARAGRAPH PLAN ANSWERS |
|--|---------------------------|
| Who were vaqueros? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 2 .) | |
| What did vaqueros do? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 4A and PART 4B .) | |
| What skills did vaqueros use to do their job? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 5 .) | |
| What tools did vaqueros use? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 6 .) | |
| Which vaquero words describe the tools vaqueros use? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 7 .) | |
| Which vaquero words describe where vaqueros do their work? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 7 .) | |
| Which vaquero words describe animals that vaqueros work with? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 7 .) | |
| Which vaquero words describe what vaqueros wear? (Hint: You can find the answer in PART 7 .) | |
| What else did you learn about vaqueros? | |

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 10 – Using your paragraph plan from **PART 9**, write a paragraph about vaqueros. Write your paragraph in the space below or on a separate document. Please include a title.

Title: _____

Vaqueros were _____

Some of the things that vaqueros did include _____

The skills vaqueros needed to do their job include _____

Different tools that they used were _____

A place that vaqueros worked in/on was a _____

Some animals they worked with were _____

Vaqueros wore _____

Some other things I learned about vaqueros were _____

Vaqueros: The First Cowboys

PART 11 – Vaqueros used different skills to do their job. Pick one thing that you like to do such as art, a chore, a class/school job, a hobby, a sport, or something else. Which skills do you use to do this? Skills are the abilities that you need in order to do something. For example, vaqueros needed skills like herding, riding, and roping in order to do their job.

Write a paragraph about something that you like to do and the skills that you need to do this. Plan your paragraph before writing it by answering the questions in the chart below. Write detailed answers in the space provided or on a separate document.

| PARAGRAPH PLAN QUESTIONS | MY PARAGRAPH PLAN ANSWERS |
|---|---------------------------|
| What is one thing that you like to do? (e.g., art, a chore, a class/school job, a hobby, a sport, etc.) | |
| How would you describe what you like to do? | |
| Why do you like to do this? | |
| Where do you do this? | |
| When do you do this? | |
| What is one skill that you need to do this? Describe the skill in detail. | |
| What is a second skill that you need to do this? Describe the skill in detail. | |
| What is a third skill that you need to do this? Describe the skill in detail. | |
| What else would you like people to know about what you do and the skills that you need to do this? | |

Vaqueros: *The First Cowboys*

PART 12 – Write your paragraph using your paragraph plan from **PART 11**. Write the paragraph in the space below or on a separate document. Please include a title.

Title: _____

One thing that I like to do is _____

The best way to describe what I do is _____

I like doing this because _____

The place where I do this is _____

I do this when _____

Some skills I need to do this include _____

Something else that I would like people to know about what I do and the skills I use is _____

PART 13 – Share your paragraph with a classmate, family member, friend, teacher, or someone else.

Resources

Images

Branding iron of TO brand, from Santa Marguerita Ranch, near Oceanside, California. The largest Spanish land grant in California, Santa Marguerita, at over 130,000 acres of ranchland, was granted to Pio Pico and his brother Andrés in 1841. Autry Museum; 89.136.280

Braided rawhide quilt, circa 1910. Gift of Charles F. Lummis, Autry Museum; 457.G.252

Cattle Drive #2, painting by James Walker, oil on canvas, 1877. California Historical Society Collections at the Autry Museum; LT2006.104.13

Four-strand braided rawhide reata, mid- to late 1800s. Once owned by Vicente Yorba, Autry Museum; 90.180.2

Glass negative of photograph, *A California Ranch Scene*, circa 1890s. Gift of George Wharton James, Autry Museum; N.7613

Lantern slide of a New Mexico Vaquero, circa 1900. Gift of George Wharton James, Autry Museum; LS.5548

Leather and rawhide Mexican saddle, circa 1900. Autry Museum; 85.6.1

Pair of early Californian carved wooden stirrups, circa 1700. Gift of Negie and Frank Bogert, Autry Museum; 2015.36.8

Photograph of a cowboy on Tracy Ranch, California, circa 1975. Gift of the Reynolds Family, Autry Museum; 95.34.174

Postcard entitled *Cattle Drive in Raton Mountains, between Trinidad, Colorado and Raton, N.M.*, circa 1913. Distributed by Fred Harvey. Autry Museum; 89.119.47

Spanish-style spur with straight shank and 23-point rowel, made at San Felipe Pueblo, circa 1700. Gift of Charles F. Lummis, Autry Museum; 326.G.300

United States of America map illustration by Alban Cooper

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Ask an adult to send the paragraph that you wrote along with your name and your age to outreach@theautry.org for a chance to be featured on our social media! Accepting work from artists of all ages. Must be 18-years or older to submit.