

**Forts on the Santa Fe Trail:
Oases on the Great American Desert
Lesson Design by: Jim Wheeler, Chillicothe High School
11th Grade United States History
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Teaching Traditional American History Program

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<http://www.chillihistoryproject.com/>

Lesson Overview: From the 1821 to about 1880, The Santa Fe Trail was one of the most important trade routes for both the United States and Mexico. Spanning 900 miles between Missouri and Santa Fe, it brought together a cultural mosaic of individuals who cooperated and, at times, clashed. In the process, the rich and varied cultures of Indian peoples caught in the middle were changed forever.

In this lesson, students will research two of the main outposts on the trail: Fort Larned and Bent's Old Fort. They will compare and contrast the two to learn the roles that forts played in the American frontier.

Essential Questions:

- What roles did forts play in the American frontier?
- How did people from different cultures interact on the American frontier?
- What role did trade play in American expansion?

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students should be able to:

- Describe and evaluate the evolution of United States domestic and foreign policies, including Manifest Destiny (MO GLE: SS 2a.D.(4));
- Describe the historical development of the American economy, including changing relationships between government and the economy (MO GLE: SS 2a.C.(3)).

Materials: Students will need access to the internet to conduct their research. If this is not feasible, most of the information from the websites can be printed, copied, and distributed to students.

Class Time: Two to three 50-minute periods.

Teacher Input: Begin by giving students some background information about the Santa Fe Trail (see the Teacher Notes page).

Explain that the Santa Fe Trail was different from the Oregon and California Trails in a key way: the Oregon and California Trails were mostly one-way routes of migration, while the Santa Fe Trail was a two-way route of commerce. The traders who travelled this trail did so primarily to make money.

Activities:

Period/Day One: Students should read the “Stories” page from the National Park Service’s Santa Fe Trail website: <http://www.nps.gov/safe/historyculture/stories.htm> . They should use this information to answer the questions on the Santa Fe Trail Questions sheet.

Period/Day Two: Students should work in pairs. One student should research Bent’s Old Fort, while the other should research Fort Larned. Each should carefully examine the websites for information on his or her fort, then write the information on his or her fort’s Fact Sheet. Then they should work together to compare and contrast the forts by filling out a ven diagram.

Assessment: Each student will himself or herself in the place of a person who has visited both Fort Larned and Bent’s Old Fort during his or her travels on the old Santa Fe Trail. Each student should write a letter to a relative “back in Missouri” who is considering making the journey down the trail. The letter should give some basic information on the two forts, focusing on the differences between the Fort Larned and Bent’s Fort and what the relative can expect to experience when visiting each one.

Questions for review:

- Why did the federal government create forts along the Santa Fe Trail?
- Why did men like Charles Bent and Ceran St. Vrain create a fort on the Santa Fe Trail?
- How did the Santa Fe Trade make some people’s live better? How did the trade make some people’s live worse?

Closure: Ask students if they can draw any modern parallels to Bent’s Old Fort (one possible answer: the truck stop).

Extension:

Students may find it interesting to research the forts along the California and Oregon Trails and compare/contrast them to the two forts in this lesson.

Reference:

- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Grade-Level Expectations for Social Studies:
<http://www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLE/SSgle.html>

Teacher Notes

Between 1821 and 1880, the Santa Fe Trail was primarily a commercial highway connecting Missouri and Santa Fe, New Mexico. From 1821 until 1846, it was an international commercial highway used by Mexican and American traders. In 1846, the Mexican-American War began. The Army of the West followed the Santa Fe Trail to invade New Mexico. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war in 1848, the Santa Fe Trail became a national road connecting the United States to the new southwest territories. Commercial freighting along the trail continued, including considerable military freight hauling to supply the southwestern forts. The trail was also used by stagecoach lines, thousands of gold seekers heading to the California and Colorado gold fields, adventurers, fur trappers, and emigrants. In 1880 the railroad reached Santa Fe and the trail faded into history.

WEB RESOURCES

Background on the Santa Fe Trail:

<http://www.nps.gov/safe/historyculture/stories.htm>

National Park Service's Santa Fe Trail map:

<http://www.nps.gov/PWR/customcf/apps/maps/mini-band.gif>

Bent's Old Fort Sites:

<http://www.santafetrailsenicandhistoricbyway.org/bentof.html>

<http://www.scsc.k12.ar.us/2003outwest/WilliamsA/default.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/beol/index.htm>

Fort Larned Sites:

http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1957/57_3_unrau.htm

<http://www.nps.gov/fols/>

http://www.vlib.us/old_west/forts.html#larned

<http://www.forttours.com/pages/fortlarned.asp>

Santa Fe Trail Questions

1. Click on the "View Map" link. What present-day states did the Santa Fe Trail cross?
2. According to the map, what was the difference between the Mountain Route and the Cimarron Route?
3. What three conflicts brought soldiers to the Santa Fe Trail?
4. Why did trail travelers usually cross a stream or river before stopping for the night, rather than crossing in the morning?
5. Where on the Santa Fe Trail did Union troops win a decisive victory over Texas Confederates in 1862?
6. Besides trading, what other kinds of economic activity were spawned on the Santa Fe Trail?

	<p style="text-align: center;">Bent's Old Fort <i>"...the outside exactly fills my idea of an ancient castle." Susan Shelby Magoffin describing Bent's Old Fort in 1846</i></p>
<p>When was the fort established? When did the fort shut down?</p>	
<p>Who founded the fort?</p>	
<p>Where was the fort located? Be specific. Why was it placed there?</p>	
<p>What is the nearest water source?</p>	
<p>What was the primary building material (in other words, what were the buildings' walls made of)?</p>	
<p>Why was the fort established? In other words, what was the fort's main purpose?</p>	
<p>How successful was the fort in fulfilling its purpose?</p>	
<p>What groups of people came to the fort?</p>	
<p>What kinds of activity happened at the fort?</p>	

What changes took place over time at the fort?	
What problems did people face at the fort?	
Why did the fort shut down?	
Write at least one other interesting fact you learned about the fort.	

	<p style="text-align: center;">Fort Larned</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I consider it essential to have two permanent stations for troops, one at the mouth of Pawnee Fork, and one at Big Timbers, both upon the Arkansas River. . . . To control them (the Indians), it is essential to have among them the perpetual presence of a controlling military force.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>William Bent, 1859</i></p>
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Venn Diagram

