

No Man's Land – Declaring a Territory

About this lesson

Grade Level: Upper
Elementary/Middle
School/High School

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Time: One to two class
periods

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Abstract/Introduction Students will explore why settlers in land that would become Oklahoma's Panhandle established a government and declared the Territory of Cimarron.

Background Use the attached "Background for No Man's Land."

Economic Reasoning Even though land was precious to early American settlers, it seemed no one wanted to claim the strip of land which eventually became Oklahoma's Panhandle. Rules were enacted through a variety of treaties and compromises that discouraged governments from seeking ownership of the Cimarron Strip as it was sometimes called. There were few incentives to make this vast, treeless plain attractive to governments, but it had allurements for settlers and outlaws.

Goals/Objectives

Students will:

1. Discuss No Man's Land using Transparency #1.
2. Organize and present an oral report based on the economic principles on Attachment I.

Standards

This lesson could be taught from fourth to twelfth grade. It meets PASS standards in:

Social Studies

Grade 4: Standards 4 and 5

Grade 5: Standard 7

Geography

Grade 7: Standards 2, 5, and 6

U.S. History 8th Grade

Standards 8 and 9

Oklahoma History

Standards 4, 6, and 8

High School Economics

Standards 4.1, 6, and 7.1

Materials Needed

A period map of No Man's Land

Attachment I - Guide to Economic Reasoning

Attachment II - Background for No Man's Land

Procedure

1. Activity:

- a. Read the Background material with students. Divide the class into four groups: Texas, United States, Settlers, Outlaws.
- b. Each group will discuss why it did not want the Panhandle to be part of any state.
 - i. Texas wanted to be a slave state, so it could not lay claim to any land north of 36°30' north latitude
 - ii. US Government – treaties set the southern boundaries of Kansas and Colorado as well as the east border with New Mexico.
 - iii. Settlers were able to do their own thing and even set up the Territory of Cimarron so they could make and enforce laws.
 - iv. Outlaws wanted No Man's Land free of all restraint as they might continue to hide there in safety while raiding nearby towns.

2. Discussion:

- a. Have groups report and discuss each report in terms of the following economic principles.
 - i. Resources are scarce, therefore, people must choose. *[Government and law and order were scarce resources. Land was also scarce. People had to choose whether or not to homestead in a lawless land or move to a safer location.]*
 - ii. People's choices involve cost. *[Living in a lawless land left people open to attack by Indians and Outlaws. On the other hand, land was rich and farms were large.]*
 - iii. People's choices influence environmental quality. *[People tend to group together in towns and farmers claimed more and more land breaking the land for cash crops.]*
 - iv. People's choices are influenced by incentives. *[Settlers knew land was available for the taking because no government existed to set rules. On the other hand, land was available for the taking by outlaws and unscrupulous people who simply moved in and pushed the original land holder out. Outlaws had an incentive to hide in No Man's Land because there was no law to capture them. Therefore, they raided in nearby states and territories then took refuge in No Man's Land.]*
 - v. People create rules that influence their choices and incentives. *[Settlers wanted to protect their homes and businesses, so settlers petitioned Congress to allow them to set up a territorial government. Without waiting for a reply, they proceeded with their plan and set up the Territory of Cimarron. Rather than recognize the Territory of Cimarron, Congress attached the Panhandle to the Territory of Oklahoma in 1890.]*
 - vi. People take better care of things they own and value. *[The Panhandle was a lawless, unclaimed strip of land appropriately labeled "No Man's Land"]*

because no one wanted to claim it. Once the area became part of the Territory of Oklahoma, there was access to federal protection, federal funding, and federal laws.]

Closure

Discuss with students how each of the four groups in the activity may have reacted to the news that the Territory of Cimarron had been added to the Territory of Oklahoma.

Bibliography

Brown, Elmer E., "No Man's Land," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June, 1926.

Wardell, M. L., "Southwest's History written in Oklahoma's Boundary Story: Struggle for Control of Mississippi Valley Leaves Its Mark on State," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 5, No. 3, September, 1927.

Extension

- Have students search the archives of *The Oklahoman* for additional information on Cimarron Territory and the Oklahoma Panhandle. Selected readings include:
 - "Plan of No Man's Land Originally to become State," July 28, 1912, page 11
 - "Before it was Oklahoma," by Richard Mize, April 22, 2007, page 130
 - "Panhandle Stories Varied as Tumbling Weeds," by Jim Etter, March 13, 1990, page 14.
- Have students use the archives to find current stories about the Oklahoma Panhandle

Tales of Oklahoma Project
Oklahoma Council on Economic Education

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Attachment 1

Guide to Economic Reasoning

Resources are scarce; therefore, people must choose.

People's choices involve costs.

People's choices influence environmental quality.

People's choices are influenced by incentives.

People create rules that influence their choices and incentives.

People take better care of things they own and value.

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Attachment 2

Exploring Oklahoma's Past

By Charlsie Allen

The Panhandle of Oklahoma has a very old history which has often separated it from surrounding states and even the rest of the state of which it eventually became a part.

When the 1819 treaty with Spain set the boundary between Spain and the new United States for the acquisition known as the Louisiana Purchase, part of that border was 100° west longitude. The 100th meridian formed most of the western border of present day Oklahoma, and it separated the future Oklahoma Panhandle from the rest of the land that would become Indian Territory.

In 1819 the Panhandle area belonged to Spain. Then it belonged to Mexico; and when the Texicans declared independence from Mexico in 1845, it became part of the Panhandle of the Republic of Texas. When Texas entered the Union, the oblong piece of land began to take shape because Texas renounced ownership to it because Texas had other priorities.

According to a compromise in the United States Congress, the northern latitude 36°30' was designated as the line separating the Southern slave states from the Northern free states. With that strip of land, the Texas Panhandle extended further north than 36°30'. Because Texas wanted to reserve the right to be a slave-holding state, she ceded all lands north of "thirty-six thirty" to the United States. That latitude became the southern boundary of a strip of land referred to as the neutral lands.

Another agreement or compromise made in 1850 involved the eastern boundary of the Territory of New Mexico. That boundary was set along the 103rd meridian which also became the western boundary of that tidbit of land north of the new state of Texas. Then, the Kansas-Nebraska Act set the southern boundary of Kansas at the 37th parallel north and the western boundary at 102° west longitude.

Only that portion of the northern boundary between the southwest corner of Kansas and the northeast corner of New Mexico was yet to be determined. In 1861 when the Territory of Colorado was established, the last section of border followed the 37th parallel to the New Mexico border along southern border of Colorado Territory.

At this point, an area of land about 30 miles wide and 165 miles long was drawn onto maps of the west -- a tract of land not claimed by any state, a true "No Man's Land." It stretched east to west from 100° west longitude to 103° west longitude and north to south from the 37th parallel north to 36°30' parallel north.

No Man's Land was not uninhabited, however. Settlers poured into the area. Outlaws rode hard to arrive in No Man's Land where they would be safe from the laws of the United States. They hid in caves and camped along the banks of Beaver River. There was no government, and it came under no set of laws.

According to Elmer Brown (Chronicles of Oklahoma), "...the absence of restraining

statutes gave the settlers and officers from the states, a free hand in the capture and removal of those who had broken state laws. Statutes frequently hamper the officer in his struggle with the outlaw while statutes never restrain the outlaw.” Therefore, the very fact that No Man’s Land did not come under Federal law gave locally appointed officers much more leeway in dealing with law breakers.

The intrepid settlers were not daunted by a lack of government protection from the United States. Small villages dotted the land, but only Beaver reached the status of a city with its population of 800. “There was no railway construction, no public buildings constructed, the towns were mostly built of sod...” (Brown), but the families came and stayed.

Settlers raised some cattle and planted a little corn which usually did not fare well. Wheat that would be hardy in the hot summertime as well as the cold winters would not appear for many years. Many of the settlers had brought money with them when they traveled from the east into this new land.

Some of them made money by collecting wagon loads of bones from slaughtered buffalo and losses from cattle drives which lay bleaching on the dry flat land. A wagon load of bones would bring the settler about \$11.00. Since it also took ten or more days to fill the wagon, the settler made about a dollar a day from the bones.

The settlers petitioned Congress for the right to organize a territory. Not waiting for Congress’ nod of approval, however, the settlers actually set up a government naming it the Territory of Cimarron. Organized law had come to No Man’s Land at last.

However, the settlers’ dreams of becoming a separate territory or even a state were dashed when the federal government added No Man’s Land to the Territory of Oklahoma in 1890. The whole of Cimarron Territory became the sixth county, later named Beaver County, under the Enabling Act.

One of Oklahoma’s best known characteristics is the Panhandle which has been likened to the handle of a great meat cleaver. Maybe that is what keeps Oklahoma on the cutting edge of the future.

Reading Oklahoma:

Brown, Elmer E., “No Man’s Land,” Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. 4, No. 2, June, 1926.

Wardell, M. L., “Southwest’s History written in Oklahoma’s Boundary Story: Struggle for Control of Mississippi Valley Leaves Its Mark on State,” Chronicles of Oklahoma, Vol. 5, No. 3, September, 1927.