

# Legends of the Lasso: Celebrating Black Cowboys of the Wild West

## Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will discover the hidden history of the American West. While many movies show only one type of cowboy, the real Wild West was full of diversity! Students will learn about the "Real McCoy" of lawmen, Bass Reeves, and the "Bulldogging" legend, Bill Pickett, while practicing their own cowboy skills through crafts and movement.

## Learning Objectives

- Identify that approximately one in four cowboys in the 1800s were Black.
- Describe the unique contributions of Bass Reeves (law enforcement) and Bill Pickett (rodeo/ranching).
- Demonstrate "cowboy logic" by solving a simulated ranching problem.
- Create a "Legendary Frontier Badge" or "Wanted Poster" representing a famous Black cowboy.

## Materials Needed

- Yellow or gold construction paper (for badges)
- Brown paper bags or "parchment" paper (for posters)
- Markers, crayons, and glue
- A 3-foot length of soft rope or thick yarn (per student)
- Optional: A hula hoop or a chair (to act as a "steer")
- Printouts of Bass Reeves and Bill Pickett (or access to digital images)

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## 1. Introduction: The Cowboy Mystery (Hook)

**The Hook:** Ask the student, "Close your eyes and picture a cowboy. What do they look like? What are they wearing?"

**The Big Reveal:** Tell them: "Did you know that back in the 1800s, about 1 in every 4 cowboys was Black? After the Civil War, many Black men moved West to find freedom and jobs. They became some of the toughest, smartest, and most famous heroes of the frontier! Today, we're going to step into their boots."

## 2. Content & Modeling (I Do)

### Meet the Legends:

- **Bass Reeves: The Great Lawman.** Bass was the first Black U.S. Deputy Marshal west of the Mississippi. He was a master of disguise! Sometimes he dressed as a cowboy, a farmer, or even an outlaw to catch "bad guys." He caught over 3,000 criminals and never got a single scratch in a gunfight. Many people believe he was the real inspiration for the *Lone Ranger*!
- **Bill Pickett: The Rodeo Star.** Bill was a ranch hand who invented a totally new way to catch cattle called "bulldogging." He would jump off his horse and wrestle a steer to the ground! He

became a world-famous performer in Wild West shows, showing everyone that Black cowboys were the best in the business.

**The Cowboy Code:** Explain that cowboys weren't just about fighting; they had to be honest, hard-working, and take care of their animals. This was called "The Code of the West."

### 3. Guided Practice (We Do)

#### Activity: The "Bulldogger" Knot & Loop

1. Give the student the rope or yarn.
2. **The Lesson:** Teach them how to tie a simple "Honda knot" (a loop at the end of the rope) to create a lasso.
3. **The Practice:** Together, try "lassoing" a chair leg or a hula hoop on the ground. Explain that cowboys like Bill Pickett had to be incredibly accurate to keep the herd safe.
4. **Discussion:** "If you were Bass Reeves and had to catch a cattle rustler without them knowing who you were, what costume would you wear?" (Brainstorm funny or clever disguises).

### 4. Independent Application (You Do)

#### Project: The Hero of the Frontier Poster

Students will choose either Bass Reeves or Bill Pickett (or create their own Black Cowboy persona based on what they've learned) to create a "Commemorative Poster."

- **Step 1:** Take a piece of brown paper. Crinkle it up and flatten it out to make it look "old."
- **Step 2:** Draw a portrait of the cowboy in the center.
- **Step 3:** At the top, write their name. At the bottom, write their "Special Skill" (e.g., "Master of Disguise" or "Invented Bulldogging").
- **Step 4:** Decorate the corners with symbols like stars, horseshoes, or lassos.

### 5. Conclusion & Review

**Summary:** Recap the main points. Ask the student:

- "Why were Black cowboys so important to the West?" (They did the hard work of ranching and kept the peace).
- "What was one cool fact about Bass Reeves?" (Disguises, caught 3,000 outlaws).
- "How did Bill Pickett change the rodeo?" (He invented steer wrestling/bulldogging).

**Closing:** Have the student stand up, put on their "imaginary hat," and give a loud "Yee-haw!" to celebrate their new knowledge.

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## Assessment Methods

- **Formative:** During the lasso activity, check if the student can explain why a lasso was a tool for work rather than a weapon.
- **Summative:** Evaluate the "Hero of the Frontier Poster." Success is defined as including the cowboy's name and at least one accurate historical fact or skill.

## Differentiation & Adaptability

- **For Younger Learners (Scaffolding):** Provide a pre-printed outline of a cowboy for the poster. Focus more on the "Action" stories of the cowboys.
- **For Advanced Learners (Extension):** Research "Nat Love," another famous Black cowboy, and compare his life to Bass Reeves. Write a short "Diary Entry" from the perspective of a cowboy on a long cattle drive.
- **Classroom/Group Tip:** Have students set up a "Cowboy Camp" with different stations: one for lassoing, one for the craft, and one for "Storytelling" where they share their posters.

## Success Criteria

- Student can name at least two famous Black cowboys.
- Student can explain what "Bulldogging" is.
- The completed poster shows a clear connection to the historical figures discussed.