

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Historical Perspectives

## ● Westward Expansion ●

*During the first half of the 19th century, the United States government claimed millions of acres of new territory. Soon, Americans began heading west to explore and settle the “new” land. Below, you will read about three events that took place during that time period.*

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### The Louisiana Purchase

The Louisiana Purchase was a land deal that took place in 1803, where France gave the United States over 800,000 square miles of new land. The land that the Louisiana Purchase included is now home to 14 states. Louisiana had gone through many hands before the deal took place, having been passed back and forth between Spain and France many times. The land was in Spain’s possession (who had it mainly to keep the British from taking it) when it began to be settled by nearby Americans. New Orleans had proved to be the most important port on the Mississippi River, which was a major thoroughfare for trade in the United States as more and more people began to move west. In 1800, a secret agreement was made between Spain and France, and the land was given back to France. Napoleon sent troops to the port and their presence began to worry citizens, who feared they may take over the West and later the entire United States. When President Jefferson heard about this, he sent James Monroe and Robert Livingston to Paris to talk to Napoleon, the Emperor of France, about buying Louisiana as a way to have access to New Orleans and the river. Jefferson didn’t like the idea of buying the entire territory for many reasons: he thought it implied that France deserved to be in the United States in the first place, and he also didn’t think it was his place as a president to make such a large transaction, since it was not explicitly written in the Constitution. However, he knew that not doing anything could result in a war to drive the French off American land. On April 30, 1803, the United States and France signed the Louisiana Purchase Treaty. Jefferson then began preparing to send explorers to map the new land, eventually sending Lewis and Clark.

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### The Trail of Tears

The Trail of Tears is a path that over 16,000 Native Americans walked after the Indian Removal Act was passed in 1830. European settlers had always wanted to own Native American land, but when Andrew Jackson was elected president in 1829, he began to pass laws that forced Native Americans living east of the Mississippi to move west of the Mississippi so that he could use their land. Several of the Native American tribes resisted the take-over of their ancestral lands, but were forcibly removed by local and state militias. This removal is called the “Trail of Tears” because over 4,000 people died of starvation, disease, injury, and exhaustion during the journey, which crossed nine different states over several thousand miles of land and water. When they arrived in the area the government designated Indian territory, west of the Mississippi River, several of the tribes reorganized and continued to advocate for their human rights.

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## The Homestead Act

The Homestead Act was a document signed in 1862 that allowed settlers to claim land in the west. The Homestead Act turned over acres and acres of public land to private citizens. Homesteads, the name for the large spaces of land that people could claim, could be up to 160 acres in size. Almost anyone could apply to claim land under the Homestead Act—in order to be eligible, a person only had to be 21 or older and the head of a household. This meant that people of all types were afforded the right to claim their homestead. Women, immigrants, African-Americans, and other groups of people who did not have many rights at the time were able to legally own the land claimed by the Homestead Act. After living on the land for five years, the land would officially become theirs. Most homesteads were in the Great Plains, in what are now states like Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Most homesteaders (people who claimed land under the act) used their land for farming. People who lived on the homestead often did not have much money, and lived in small, one-room sod houses, or houses made of soil and dirt. The Homestead Act was one of several events responsible for making the western United States what it is today.

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### Think like a historian!

1. In what ways was the world different in the early 1800s than it is now?

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2. What would your life be like if you lived during that time period?

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3. What different points of view are represented in the three texts above?

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4. Who was happy about westward expansion? Who was not?

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Answer this prompt on a separate piece of paper:

**How did westward expansion change people's lives?**