



The Environment of the West

CCSSR2—analyze a passage to identify relationships.

Long ago, the Western part of the United States was open land. Today, where you see highways there were no roads. The land was hilly. There were great mountains. There were enormous fields, called plains. The bison, or buffalo, lived there. They roamed wherever they wanted. Eagles flew above the land. In summer it was hot and dry. In winter, it was windy. Parts of the environment were desert, so dry that only cactus could grow well. Snakes and lizards lived in the desert. They would come out at night when it was cooler. During the day they slept.

For many years, Native Americans had lived in these lands. They had farmed. They had hunted animals. They had built homes. Some Native Americans built homes out of a kind of brick. They made the bricks from clay. They put them together into thick walls. Those walls would keep the homes cool during the day. They would keep the heat inside at night. When the sun went down, the desert would become cold. So it was good to have a way to keep heat inside.

Settlers from the East came to this environment. They brought tools. They arrived in covered wagons. Oxen pulled the wagons. When the settlers came to a place where there was water, they would stop. They would camp there. Sometimes they chose to stay where they camped. They set up a small village. They would start to farm. They would hunt, too.

Some people started to build ranches in the West. They would raise herds of cattle. The cowboys who worked for the ranch would ride with the cattle. They would watch over them. They might have a dog to help them. The dogs would help to herd the cattle. The land was wide open. The cattle might go for many miles to find grass to eat. The cowboys would herd them to places to get water, too. They were grown men, but they were called boys. They were called cowboys because they took care of the cows. They worked hard every day. They would get up early in the morning to start to herd the cattle. There was no rest until sundown.

The cowboys had to protect the cows from predators, including wolves and coyotes that might come after the cattle at night. Then the cowboys might have to get up in the night scare the predators away.

Living in the West used to be all about living with nature. Today, you will see big highways. You'll still see the mountains and the rivers. And herds of cattle still live on the ranches. But the cowboys today have trucks and motorcycles. The natural environment has stayed the same. Ways of living and working there have changed.

See What You Read

Draw a two-part picture. In part one, show what the West used to look like. In part two, show what it looks like today.