

YOUNG READERS

RANCH DRESSING

The Traditional Cowboy Costume

By Jennie Chinn

Every occupation has its own tradition, or folk heritage. These traditions often grow out of workers' stories, jokes, songs, beliefs, superstitions, and even their clothes and styles of dressing.

Cowboys and ranchers share a particularly colorful folk heritage. The origin of the American cowboy has its roots in the cattle drives that followed the long trails from Texas to Kansas. In 1867 the first herd of cattle was shipped by railroad from Abilene, Kansas, to stockyards in Chicago. Since the late 1800s Kansas has been one of the top beef producing states; in this century more land in Kansas has been devoted to ranching than to any other single use.

The work of the cowboy and rancher involves long hours and hard work. Ranching often does not pay well, and cowboys' wages are low. But people are drawn to this profession often because of its traditional culture, identified in part by the cowboy's unique "costume." The tall, wide-brimmed hat and the high-heeled boots are probably the most

familiar pieces of the cowboy outfit, each serving important functions for the working cowboy. The hat keeps the head dry from rain and shaded from the hot sun. It also is used to signal other cowboys and to distract a charging cow. The boots' pointed toes slide easily into the saddle's stirrups, and the high heels hold the boots in place. The heels also dig into the ground giving the cowboy support when tangling with a tough horse or ornery calf. The boots' high tops, made of strong leather, protect the cowboys' legs from brush. Fancy stitching adds color and decoration, and it makes the leather stiffer to give added protection.

The outfit, which also often includes spurs, chaps, gloves, and bandanna, is only part of the cowboy's traditional life. How cowboys ride their horses and work the cattle, what they eat and what they do for fun are all part of the tradition. On the following pages are poems and folk songs about life on the range that will help us understand more about the cultural heritage of the cowboy.



FOLK SONGS

Cowboy folk songs and poetry tell us about life on the range, both the good or in the bunkhouse. They were written to be shared with other cowboys and to be poems: 1. Make a list of what they tell you about cowboys and cowboy life. 2. Create wear? What kind of horses do your characters ride, and what are the horses' names? cowboy/cowgirl? 3. Write a poem or a folk song about *your* work or chores in school

The Kansas Line

From the Kansas State Historical Society

Come all you jolly cowmen; don't you want to go
Way up on the Kansas line?
Where you whoop up the cattle from morning till
night.
All out in the midnight rain.
The cowboy's life is a dreadful life,
He's driven through heat and cold;
I'm almost froze with the water on my clothes,
A-ridin' through heat and cold.
I've been where the lightnin', the lightnin' tangled in
my eyes.
The cattle I could scarcely hold;
Think I heard my boss man say:
"I want all brave-hearted men who ain't afraid to die
To whoop up the cattle from morning till night,
Way up on the Kansas line."

Way Out West in Kansas

From Cowboys and Western Songs by Austin and Alta S. Fife.

The sun's so hot that eggs will hatch
Way out west in Kansas,
It'll pop the corn in a popcorn patch
Way out west in Kansas.
An old mule coming down the path
Saw the corn and lost his breath,
He thought it was snow and froze to death,
Way out west in Kansas.

The Old Chisholm Trail

From Cowboys and Western Songs by Austin and Alta S. Fife.

Oh come along, boys, and listen to my tale,
I'll tell you all my troubles on the ol' Chis'm trail.

Refrain: Come a-ti yi youpy youpy ya youpy yay,
Come a-ti yi youpy youpy yay.

On a ten-dollar horse and a forty-dollar saddle,
I was ridin', and a-punchin' Texas cattle.

Refrain

We left ol' Texas October twenty-third,
Drivin' up trail with a 2 U Herd.

Refrain

I'm up in the mornin' afore daylight,
An' afore I sleep the moon shined bright.

Refrain

It's bacon and beans most every day,
I'd as soon be eatin' prairie hay.

Refrain

of Cowboy Life

times and the bad. These poems and songs often were created around the campfire performed, either recited or sung. After reading the following folk songs and your own cowboy and/or cowgirl. What are your characters' names? What do they What do your cowhands do on the ranch? What else can you tell us about your or at home.

POETRY

The Cowboy's Dream

By Bruce Kiskaddon, from *Cowboy Poetry: A Gathering*.

A cowboy and his trusty pal
Were camped one night by an old corral;
They were keeping a line on the boss's steers
And looking for calves with lengthy ears.
The summer work was long since through
And only the winter branding to do.
When he went to rest there was frost on his bed
But he pulled the tarp over his head,
And into his blankets he burrowed deep;
He soon got warm and was fast asleep.
He dreamed he was through with his wayward past
And he landed safe in Heaven at last.

To Be A Top Hand

By Georgie Sicking, from *Cowboy Poetry: A Gathering*.

When I was a kid and doing my best to
Learn the ways of our land,
I thought mistakes were never made by
A real top hand.

He never got into a storm with a horse,
He always knew
How a horse would react in any case
And just what to do.

He never let a cow outfigure him
And never missed a loop.
He always kept cattle under control
Like chickens in a coop.

He was never in the right place at the wrong
Time or in anybody's way.
For working cattle he just naturally knew
When to move and when to stay.

I just about broke my neck tryin'
To be and do
All those things a good cowboy just
Naturally knew.

One day while riding with a cowboy
I knew was one of the best,
For he had worked in that country for a long
Time, and taken and passed the test,

I was telling my troubles, some
Bad mistakes I'd made,
That my dreams of being a top cowgirl
Were startin' to fade.

This cowboy looked at me and said
With a sort of smile,
"A sorry hand is in the way all the time,
A good one just once in awhile."

Since that day I've handled lots of cattle
And ridden many a mile,
and I figure I'm doin' my share if I get
In the way just once in awhile.

Fancy Footwork

Many stories are told about how the cowboy boot was first made in Kansas. Legend credits two Kansans, C.H. Hyer of Olathe and J.W. Cubine of Coffeyville, with making the first cowboy boot in the 1870s. No one knows for certain if the cowboy boot was invented in our state, but even so, Kansas boot makers have played an important part in developing this specialized footwear. For many years the Hyer Boot Company made a special boot with the "spread eagle" pattern (shown below) on the boot tops. This design was the signature boot for entertainer Roy Rogers. To make your own boot tops, make four copies of the pattern (enlarge or decrease as needed). Color the eagle. Cut out the patterns and, along each side, staple two cut-outs together for each leg (with the eagles on the outside). Put your legs through the cut-outs and you have your own fancy boot tops!

