



Manifest Destiny (Middle School)

U.S. Territorial Expansion



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Grade Level	8th Grade	Time Frame	2 class period(s)
Subject	Social Studies	Duration	100 minutes
Course	U.S. History		

Essential Question

How was the concept of Manifest Destiny used to motivate and justify U.S. territorial expansion? How did Manifest Destiny impact multiple groups of people differently?

Summary

In this middle school lesson, best facilitated at the beginning of a westward expansion unit, students analyze John Gast's painting "American Progress," then read and analyze primary source documents to construct their own definition of "Manifest Destiny." To deepen their understanding, students analyze primary and secondary source documents to determine why some people were opposed to Manifest Destiny. To further consider how Manifest Destiny impacted multiple groups of people differently, students create a Two-Voice Poem. This lesson includes optional modifications for distance learning. Resources for use in Google Classroom are included.

Snapshot

Engage

Using the Quick Draw and Picture Deconstruction strategies, students analyze John Gast's painting "American Progress."

Explore

Students read and analyze primary source documents that include the term "Manifest Destiny" to determine a definition of the concept.

Explain

Students read and analyze primary and secondary source documents to explain why some people opposed Manifest Destiny.

Extend

Students consider the perspectives of several different groups of people to create a two-voice poem that expresses the voices of someone who supported Manifest Destiny as a justification for U.S. expansion, and someone who opposed it.

Evaluate

Written responses from the Explore and Explain section and the Two-Voice Poem from the Extend

section serve as evaluations for this lesson.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies Practices (8th Grade))

8.8.1: Examine the concept and opposing perspectives toward Manifest Destiny as a motivation and justification for westward expansion.

Attachments

- [American-Progress-Photo-Deconstruction-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.docx](#)
- [American-Progress-Photo-Deconstruction-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [American-Progress-Photo-Deconstruction-Manifest-Destiny.docx](#)
- [American-Progress-Photo-Deconstruction-Manifest-Destiny.pdf](#)
- [Lesson-Slides-Manifest-Destiny.pptx](#)
- [Manifest-Destiny-Disputed-Handout-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Manifest-Destiny-Disputed-Handout-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Manifest-Destiny-Disputed-Handout-Manifest-Destiny.docx](#)
- [Manifest-Destiny-Disputed-Handout-Manifest-Destiny.pdf](#)
- [Two-Voice-Poem-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Two-Voice-Poem-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Two-Voice-Poem-Manifest-Destiny.docx](#)
- [Two-Voice-Poem-Manifest-Destiny.pdf](#)
- [What-is-Manifest-Destiny-Handout-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.docx](#)
- [What-is-Manifest-Destiny-Handout-Manifest-Destiny - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [What-is-Manifest-Destiny-Handout-Manifest-Destiny.docx](#)
- [What-is-Manifest-Destiny-Handout-Manifest-Destiny.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- American Progress Photo Deconstruction handout (attached; one per student)
- What is Manifest Destiny? handout (attached; one per student)
- Manifest Destiny Disputed (attached)
- Two-Voice Poem handout (attached)

50 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Lesson Context

This lesson provides students with a broad foundational understanding of the concept of Manifest Destiny. It would best fit at the beginning of a westward expansion unit and then could be built upon throughout the unit, as there is much more to discuss in terms of how Manifest Destiny relates to specific events and situations that involve U.S. territorial expansion.

Begin by dividing students into groups of 3 or 4. Students will be working in these groups for most of the lesson. Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide the lesson. Start with **slide 3**, showing the image below:



Gast, John. (1872). *American Progress*. Chromolithograph published by George A. Croft. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fd/American_Progress_%28John_Gast_painting%29.jpg

Distribute a copy of the attached **American Progress Photo Deconstruction handout** to each student. Using an adaptation of the [Quick Draw](#) strategy, ask students to take three minutes to draw the "American Progress" image, to their best ability, on the back of the handout, on a piece of notebook paper, or in their composition book. Please note to students that their drawing does not have to be a beautiful work of art, but they should try to capture as many details of the image as possible. This strategy is meant to help students focus on the details of the image so they can make meaningful observations and inferences.

Once students have finished their drawings, introduce the [Picture Deconstruction](#) strategy and give each group of students a number—1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. For larger classes, you may have multiple groups with the same number; for smaller classes, you may have only four groups total. Display **slide 4** that shows the same image divided into quadrants labeled 1–4. The painting's central figure is labeled 5. Groups with 1 will analyze quadrant 1, groups with 2 will analyze quadrant 2, and so on. If your class has five groups, let the fifth group analyze the figure in the middle, along with the date of the image and title of the image. If you only have four groups, invite all groups to also analyze the figure in the middle along with the date and title of the image. Give groups 3–4 minutes to discuss and record what they see in the "Observations" column of the handout. Remind students that observations are simply what they see. They are not interpreting or inferring anything yet.

Optional Modification For Distance Learning

Notes on integrating online distance learning into this lesson are included in each phase. Digital or physical versions of all handouts included in this lesson can be utilized through applications like Google Docs, [Google Classroom](#), and similar. To integrate distance learning with the above activity, you can have your students fill out the chart on the front of the handout and complete the Quick Draw activity on the back. [Download all attachments to use this lesson in Google Classroom.](#)

Next, call on each group to share something they observed for the portion of the painting they were assigned.

Once each group has had a chance to share, ask students to now consider the image as a whole as well as the observations from their classmates. Give students 4–5 minutes to work within their groups to interpret what is going on in the image, what the artist wants us to think and feel, what the figure in the image represents, etc. Students should record these thoughts in the "Inferences" column on the handout.

Next, call on each group to share out their inferences. Keep this conversation going until you feel the major themes of the image have been discussed.

Teacher's Note: Guiding Conversations

As you facilitate the class conversation about the image, the following are additional questions you can use to draw students' attention to certain parts of the image: *Notice some parts of the painting are dark and some are light. What do the "light" and "dark" imply? How does the title, American Progress, relate to what's happening in the image? This image was created in 1872, after the U.S. had expanded all the way to the Pacific Ocean. How might that influence what the artist is trying to convey as well as how we interpret the image?* Additionally, you may wish to use [this website](#) (full URL included in the Resources below) which includes a full interpretation of the painting as a resource to support the class discussion.

Display **slide 5** and explain to students that this painting reflects a concept that they will be exploring for the remainder of the lesson called "Manifest Destiny." In addition to defining the concept, students will also explore the following **Essential Questions:** *How was the concept of Manifest Destiny used to motivate and justify U.S. territorial expansion? How did Manifest Destiny impact multiple groups of people, including Americans, Native Americans, and Mexicans, during the mid-1800s?*

30 minutes

Explore

Next, display **slide 6**, showing students a map of the United States in 1810. Distribute the "**What is Manifest Destiny?**" **handout** to each student. Explain to students that they will use three primary sources to create a definition of Manifest Destiny. Using the map on slide 6, review with students what the country looked like in 1810. Keeping the map in mind, bring your students' attention to the first source on the handout, a quote from John Quincy Adams in 1811. Read the quote with the entire class. Then, give students two minutes in their groups to decide what they think Adams is saying.

Optional Modification For Distance Learning

To integrate distance learning with the above activity, you can have students write down their interpretations of the quotes and map in the sections marked "Summary" on a digital or physical version of the What is Manifest Destiny? handout. You may choose to skip the following section, which focuses on group and class brainstorms. [Download all attachments to use this lesson in Google Classroom.](#)

After two minutes, call on groups to share their thoughts. Once students have had a chance to share, summarize for students that Adams is saying: *"The entire North American continent is destined (meaning it is inevitable) to be populated by people of the United States, and that the U.S. should pursue expanding its boundary to the Pacific Ocean."* Have students use the [Stop and Jot](#) strategy to write a similar summary in the space provided on the handout. Going back to the 1810 map, it is worth noting that this was a somewhat bold claim to make in 1811 given the country's current boundary—especially since most of the Louisiana Purchase had yet to be populated by American settlers.

Next, have students work within their groups, again using Stop and Jot, to summarize the remaining two documents. Then, facilitate a class discussion, calling on groups to share their responses with the whole class. Summarize student responses clarifying any information during the discussion. Students may add to or change their summaries on their handout based on the class discussion.

Finally, display **slide 7** and ask students to brainstorm with their group how they would now define Manifest Destiny. What characteristics would need to be included in a definition of the concept? Give students four minutes to work on their definition with their groups. Groups should record their ideas in the "My Group's Brainstorms" section of the handout. Then, call on groups to share their responses. You can type their answers into slide eight if you choose.

Summarize the class discussion by displaying **slide 8**. If students are missing any key pieces of information, they should add them at this point and synthesize all information to create a final definition of Manifest Destiny in the "Class Response" section of the chart.

20 minutes

Explain

Now that students have a basic understanding of Manifest Destiny, explain to them that although many people (including those with considerable political power) supported expansion to the Pacific Ocean, there were people that disputed this policy. Ask students to consider who might oppose the idea of Manifest Destiny. To help students answer this question, distribute the **Manifest Destiny Disputed** handout.

Optional Modification For Distance Learning

To complete the following activity in an online or distance learning environment, have your student examine the three documents included in the Manifest Destiny Disputed handout. As they examine each document, make sure to ask them the questions that are intended for classroom discussion and have them write their answers in the appropriate columns on the handout. [Download all attachments to use this lesson in Google Classroom.](#)

With their groups, ask students to consider Document 1 on the handout, a map showing lands occupied by Native American groups during the 19th century. Considering what students now know about Manifest Destiny and based on their observations of the map ask them to think of a reason some people might have been opposed to the idea of Manifest Destiny. Students should record this reason in the Document 1 column on the Opposition to Manifest Destiny chart. When students are ready, call on a few groups to share their responses. Encourage students to modify their responses based on the whole-class discussion if necessary.

Possible Student Responses

Students might note that: *"If the U.S. expands to the Pacific Ocean, they will be expanding into land already occupied by various Native American groups. Native American groups and some Americans might oppose Manifest Destiny because it will cause conflict with Native Americans and the U.S. and could threaten Native American land claims and way of life."*

Next, ask students to look at Document 2, the map showing the U.S. in 1840. Ask students to discuss their observations. Given what students know about Manifest Destiny and based on their observations of this map ask them to think of a reason some people might have been opposed to the idea of Manifest Destiny. Students should record this reason in the Document 2 column of the Opposition to Manifest Destiny chart. When students are ready, call on a few groups to share their responses. Again, encourage students to modify their responses based on the whole-class discussion if necessary.

Possible Student Responses

Students might note that: *"If the U.S. pursues a Manifest Destiny policy, they will have to expand into land already occupied and controlled by Mexico, a foreign power. Mexico would likely oppose U.S. expansion into their country because it would threaten Mexico's control over its own land and people. Some Americans might oppose expanding into Mexican territory because it could be seen as an act of war against a foreign country."*

Finally, ask students to look at Document 3, a letter from William E. Channing to US Senator Henry Clay. Given what students know about Manifest Destiny and based on their understanding of the text, ask them to think of a reason some people might have been opposed to the idea of Manifest Destiny. Have students underline text evidence to support their responses. Students should record this reason in the Document 3 column of the Opposition to Manifest Destiny chart. When students are ready, call on a few groups to share their responses. As you discuss as a whole class, ask students to share and explain the words or phrases they underlined as text evidence. Once again, encourage students to modify their responses based on the whole-class discussion if necessary.

Possible Student Responses

Students might note that the author argues that: *"The U.S. is big enough already and it doesn't need any more land;" "The land the U.S. is expanding into is being taken from other people, which is wrong;" "In pursuing Manifest Destiny the actions of the U.S. would be morally wrong and criminal, taking land that belongs to Native Americans and Mexico;" and "Taking land by force is not 'progress.'"*

During the discussion of these three documents, as you field student responses, make the point that Manifest Destiny was a disputed idea. Tell students that despite the opposition to Manifest Destiny, the United States government would ultimately use this idea to justify multiple policies to further expand the boundaries of the United States. Display **slide 9** and ask students to think back to the primary and secondary sources they reviewed in the previous sections of this lesson and then discuss the following question with their group: "How did the United States use the idea of Manifest Destiny to motivate and justify their expansion into land that was already occupied?" Give groups 3–4 minutes to come up with a possible answer. Then, call on each group to share their thoughts with the whole class.

Possible Student Responses

Some possible student responses include: *"Believing in the ideas of Manifest Destiny motivated the United States to do anything to make its expansion to the Pacific coast happen"; "They justified their expansion by arguing that it was something inevitable (meant to happen no matter what)"; or "They were ushering in 'progress' by bringing their 'superior' way of life and form of government to new areas and to new people, even if by force."*

20 minutes

Extend

Explain to students that while many Americans, including most of our government officials, supported policies that reflected Manifest Destiny, there were people both within and outside the United States who opposed actions (such as Native American removal and war with Mexico) that were motivated and justified by Manifest Destiny. Introduce the [Two-Voice Poem](#) strategy and pass out the **Two-Voice Poem handout**. Invite students to create, either individually or as a group, a two-voice poem that reflects the voices of someone who supported Manifest Destiny as a justification for U.S. expansion and someone who opposed it. If time allows, have students present their two-voice poems to the class.

20 minutes

Evaluate

The "What is Manifest Destiny?" handout from the Explore section, the Manifest Destiny Disputed handout from the Explain section, and the Two-Voice Poem handout from the Extend section may serve as assessments for this lesson.

Resources

- Adams, John Quincy. Letter to John Adams. August 31, 1811. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-03-02-2020>
- Gast, J. (1872). American progress. Chromolithograph published by George A, Crofutt. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fd/American_Progress_%28John_Gast_painting%29.jpg
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Photo or picture deconstruction. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f5065b32>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Google classroom. Tech Tools. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/628>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Quick draw. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/51>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Stop and jot. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/168>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Two-Voice poems. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/133>
- Lubbrage, M. (2012). Manifest destiny. Essays. American history: from revolution to reconstruction and beyond. <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/essays/1801-1900/manifest-destiny/manifest-destiny---the-philosophy-that-created-a-nation.php#dis>