

# The Fair Starts With Agriculture

## Objective

Students will read about the history of county and state fairs in the US, Indian Territory and the State of Oklahoma. Students will answer comprehension questions about the reading. Students will develop time lines of the history of fairs. Students will develop fair entries for judging.

## Background

Our nation's first fairs were all about agriculture. They were organized to introduce farmers to new animal breeds and other agricultural innovations.

After the War of Independence, patriotic gentlemen began forming agricultural societies to promote ideas that might help the US achieve economic self-sufficiency. Elkanah Watson was a farmer and one-time revolutionary who traveled around Europe and recorded his observations about European manners, morals, farming, industry, etc. After retiring he returned to his native Massachusetts. In 1808 he held an exhibition on the village green to show two Merino sheep he had acquired. Merino sheep are valued for their fine fleece. Watson hoped to encourage farmers to raise Merino sheep to supply raw wool for his wool factory.

Two years later Watson convinced local farmers to hold a larger livestock exhibition. Its success led to the establishment of the Berkshire Agricultural Society the following year, organized for the purpose of holding an annual county fair. The first fair was held in 1811. Prizes were offered for the best livestock in the county, and more than 3,000 people attended.

In later fairs, women were invited to compete in the skills of cloth production. The purpose of these competitions was to encourage local households to lessen their dependency on European products.

Other communities began to organize county fairs not only to compete but to learn. By the 1840s county fairs would be a showcase for new American inventions—Cyrus McCormick's reaper and John Deere's steel plow—and for imported livestock. They also became a social event, giving farm families an opportunity to rest from their labors and travel to town to socialize. (Source: McCarry, John, and Randy Olson, *County Fairs: Where America Meets*, National Geographic Society, 1997.)

## Social Studies

1. Read and discuss background and vocabulary.
2. Students will divide into groups, with each group reading one of the Reading Pages about the history of fairs in the US and Oklahoma.  
—Students will discuss and answer comprehension questions within

## Oklahoma Academic Standards

### GRADE 3

Citizenship Literacy: 2,3.  
Economics: 3. Geography: 1D.  
Oklahoma History: 4.1,3,11  
Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3;  
W.1,2. Reading Foundations: 1,2.  
Reading and Writing Process:  
R.1,3. Critical Reading and  
Writing: R.7; W.1. Vocabulary:  
R.1,3,5. Multimodal: R.2  
Life Science: 1-1; 4-3,4

### GRADE 4

Culture and History of the US:  
2DE  
Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3;  
W.1,2. Reading Foundations: 1,2.  
Reading and Writing Process:  
R.1,3,4. Critical Reading and  
Writing: R.7; W.1. Vocabulary:  
R.1,3,5. Multimodal: R.2  
Life Science: 1-1

### GRADE 5

Economics and Daily Life in the  
Colonies: 2.6  
Speaking and Listening: R.1,2,3;  
W.1,2. Reading and Writing  
Process: R.1,3. Critical Reading  
and Writing: W.1. Vocabulary:  
R.1,3,5. Multimodal: R.2  
Life Science: 1-1; 2.2

their groups.

—Students will prepare news casts within their groups and report on their reading as if the events were happening live.

—As a class, students will develop a time line that reflects what they have learned about fairs.

3. Students will work in groups to develop fair-type exhibits. Contact the county Extension office about the different categories for county fair competitions.
  - Appoint judges to determine the best exhibit. Invite a county Extension educator or 4-H or FFA member.
  - Get information from your county Extension office about entering the exhibits in your county fair.
4. Students will research online to find the names of fair board members for your county. Students will each choose one member and write a letter asking questions about the history of the fair in your county, how fair prizes are financed, the benefits to the community, etc.

## English Language Arts

1. Ask students to pretend they are Elkanah Watson and need people to raise sheep for your wool factory. How would they spread the word today?
  - Students will develop marketing campaigns to get the word out.
2. Lead a discussion based on the following questions:
  - What are some ways we learn about new technology/products that were not available to the originator of the first fairs.
  - What are the advantages and disadvantages of learning about new things through fairs.
  - Students will write argumentative essays arguing for and against the use of fairs for educating the public.
3. Students will write essays about a real or imagined trip to the fair, including what new things they learned, what they saw, etc.

## Science/Technology

1. Students will grow bean plants.
  - Students will work in groups to grow their plants and determine variables in care of the plant, e.g., type of fertilizer and frequency of use, amount of sunshine allowed, amount of water, etc. Encourage students to think outside the box and come up with unusual variables for growing their beans, e.g., growing in sugar water, varying the color of the container, etc.
  - Students will use scientific journals to record hypotheses, variables and observations about the plant growth. Students may also photograph their plants in the course of the experiment for use in an exhibit.
  - At the end of the pre-determined growing period, students will place their plants and journals on display for judging, as in a fair exhibit.
  - Students will discuss as a class the benefits of sharing the results of their experiments in a fair-type exhibit.
2. Students will create healthy snacks for judging.
  - Students will brainstorm ahead of time to determine the criteria for judging healthy snacks.
  - Students will work in groups to plan their own healthy snacks.
  - Students will bring ingredients and prepare healthy snacks for judging.
  - Invite a panel of judges (nutrition specialist from the county Extension office, a parent, a cafeteria worker, etc.) to taste the snacks and judge them based on the criteria set ahead of time.
3. The first fairs were for sharing new inventions or new ways of doing things. Brainstorm some categories of information that would be useful to students and write them on the board (healthy after-school snacks, tips for doing homework, etc.) Students will choose a category and develop entries for an idea fair.

## Visual Art

1. Students will create works of art or crafts for judging.

## Extra Reading

Hokanson, Drake, and Carol Kratz, *Pure Bred and Home Grown: America's County Fairs*, University of Wisconsin, 2008.

Thomas, Peggy, and Layne Johnson, *Farmer George Plants a Nation*, Boyds Mill, 2008.

## Vocabulary

**4-H**—a program set up by the US Department of Agriculture to instruct young people in useful skills and in good citizenship

**annual**—occurring once a year

**breeding**—producing offspring by sexual reproduction

**Cooperative Extension Service**—a non-formal educational program in the US designed to help people use research-based knowledge to improve their lives. The service is provided by the state's designated land-grant universities. In most states the educational offerings are in the areas of agriculture and food, home and family, the environment, community economic development, and youth and 4-H.

**county commissioner**—an elected official charged with administering county government in some states of the United States. County commissions are usually made up of three or more individuals who levy local taxes, administer county services such as prisons, courts, public health oversight, property registration, building code enforcement, and public works such as road maintenance.

**dependency**—reliance on another for support

**exhibition**—a public showing (as of works of art, manufactured goods, or athletic skill)

**fleece**—the woolly coat of an animal (as a sheep)

**innovation**—a new idea, method, or device

**lease**—an agreement to hand over real estate for a period of time usually for a specified rent

**legislature**—an organized body of persons having the authority to make laws

**livestock**—animals kept or raised, especially farm animals kept for use and profit

**manufacture**—the making of products by hand or machinery

**native**—born in a particular place or country

**premium**—a reward for an act

**production**—something brought out by work

**self-sufficiency**—able to take care of oneself without outside help

**sited**—found a place or scene for an occurrence or event

**standard**—something set up by authority or by general consent as a model

**staple**—something in widespread and constant use or demand

**tax**—a charge usually of money set by authority on persons or property for public purposes

**vocational education**—education that prepares people for specific trades, crafts and careers at various levels from a trade, a craft, technician, or a professional position in engineering, accountancy, nursing, medicine, architecture, pharmacy, law etc.

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# Elkinah Watson and His Sheep

As you read the passage below, underline unfamiliar words. Discuss what the words might mean in your group and look them up in a dictionary.

After the War of Independence, patriotic gentlemen began forming agricultural societies to promote ideas that might help the US achieve economic self-sufficiency. Elkanah Watson was a farmer and onetime revolutionary who traveled around Europe and recorded his observations about European manners, morals, farming, industry, etc. After retiring he returned to his native Massachusetts. In 1808 he held an exhibition on the village green to show two Merino sheep he had acquired. Merino sheep are valued for their fine fleece. Watson hoped to encourage farmers to raise Merino sheep to supply raw wool for his wool factory.

Two years later Watson convinced local farmers to hold a larger livestock exhibition. Its success led to the establishment of the Berkshire Agricultural Society the following year, organized for the purpose of holding an annual county fair. The first fair was held in 1811. Prizes were offered for the best livestock in the county, and more than 3,000 people attended.

In later fairs, women were invited to compete in the skills of cloth production. The purpose of these competitions was to encourage local households to lessen their dependency on European products.

Other communities began to organize county fairs not only to compete but to learn. By the 1840s county fairs would be a showcase for imported livestock and for new American inventions like Cyrus McCormick's reaper and John Deere's steel plow. They also became a social event, giving farm families an opportunity to rest from their labors and travel to town to socialize. (Source: McCarry, John, and Randy Olson, *County Fairs: Where America Meets*, National Geographic Society, 1997.)

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1. What is the main idea of the passage? What are the supporting details? How do the supporting details support the main idea?
  2. What was Elkinah Watson's purpose for exhibiting merino sheep on the village green?
  3. What was the purpose of the Berkshire Agricultural Society?
  4. How were fairs important to the "economic self-sufficiency" of the newly-independent nation. How does the phrase "economic self-sufficiency" relate to the phrase "independent nation?"
  5. In later fairs women were encouraged to compete in the skills of cloth production for the purpose of lessening dependency on Europe. Why was it important to the new nation to be less dependent on Europe for products needed for survival?
  6. How did county fairs in later years help the nation grow?
  7. Do you think fairs are still important today? Why? What are some other ways today that we learn about new technology?

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is a program of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.

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# Fairs in the Territories

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As you read the passage below, underline unfamiliar words. Discuss what the words might mean in your group and look them up in a dictionary.

## FAIRS IN INDIAN TERRITORY

Farmers among the Five Civilized Tribes formed agricultural organizations after coming to Indian Territory in 1830. The Cherokee Agricultural Society in 1845 held the territory's first fair. It was revived by the Cherokee Farmers' Club in October 1870, when both men and women exhibited "articles of home manufacture." The purpose was to "speak ... for our National standing and progress for those of our white friends who have a mind to come." In September, 1871, in Tahlequah, the Cherokee Agricultural Society held the second fair. Rev. Stephen Foreman won "best" for his Irish potatoes, apples, peaches, and fresh preserves, R. O. Ross won for his saddle horse, Mrs. Eagle for cotton cloth, and Mrs. R. Ross for tatting.

## FAIRS IN OKLAHOMA TERRITORY

As the land runs brought Midwestern farmers into Oklahoma Territory, agricultural fairs became an autumn staple. Beaver County, in the Panhandle, claimed to be holding the Territory's first fair when residents gathered in 1891. Oklahoma City was only five months old when it held its first fair in 1889. In 1892 the first "Oklahoma Territorial Fair" was held in Oklahoma City. Cleveland County held its first annual fair in Norman in November, 1893. Towns and counties following suit in the 1890s included El Reno (1894), Newkirk (1896), Cloud Chief (1897), Payne County (1893) and "G" County (at Arapaho, 1895).

Gradually, county fair associations developed. Businessmen raised money for premiums, sited the event on land purchased or leased for the purpose, and advertised. Contestants' entry fees and general gate admissions paid the expenses.

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1. What is the main idea of the passage? What are the supporting details? How do the supporting details support the main idea?
  2. The purpose of the first fair in Indian Territory was to "speak effectually for our National standing and progress for those of our white friends who have a mind to come." Explain what that means and why it would be important to the Cherokees?
  3. According to the passage above, agricultural fairs in Oklahoma Territory became an autumn staple. If you don't know the meaning of the word "staple," look it up. Name same events in your school or your community that would be considered "autumn staples." Is the county fair one of them?
  4. What was the purpose for fair associations in Oklahoma Territory?
  5. Why do you think towns and counties in Oklahoma found it important to conduct fairs?

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# Oklahoma Territory at the World Expo

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As you read the passage below, underline unfamiliar words. Discuss what the words might mean in your group and look them up in a dictionary.

In 1903 the US celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase by holding an “international exhibition of arts, industries, manufacturers, and the products of the soil, mine, forest, and the sea.” The Lewis and Clark Expo took place in St. Louis, Missouri.

Oklahoma was still a territory but eager to show off its resources by participating in the Expo. By an act of the legislature of the Territory of Oklahoma, dated March 1, 1901, the sum of \$20,000 was appropriated for the participation of the Territory at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. On March 14, 1903, the legislature of the Territory passed a bill appropriating \$40,000 additional for the erection and equipment of the building on the grounds of the exposition, and for the transportation and installation of the exhibits of the Territory.

Among other products, specimens of all the agricultural products of the Territory were shown in the exhibit, including wheat, oats, rye, barley, shelled corn, alfalfa seed, timothy, speltz, castor beans, corn in the ear, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, broom corn, watermelons (the largest weighed 117 pounds), various field and garden vegetables, cotton and cotton-seed products, flax, and tobacco.

In the Horticultural Department the exhibit covered 1,100 square feet of floor space and included 250 jars of preserved fruits of the various kinds produced in Oklahoma, 200 bottles of Oklahoma grape wine, and about 400 plates of fresh fruits of the various kinds in their season. Four hundred and fifty bushels of the choicest apples were placed in cold storage in the fall of 1903 to keep the exhibit fresh.

On the 15th of November the exhibit had 1,800 specimens of apples from the crops of 1904. The total cost of collection, installation, and maintenance was \$4,892.48.

Source: Final Report of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Commission, <http://www.fullbooks.com/Final-Report-of-the-Louisiana-Purchase9.html>

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1. What is the main idea of the passage? What are the supporting details? How do the supporting details support the main idea?
2. Oklahoma was not yet a state when the territorial government passed a bill that provided funding for an Oklahoma exhibit at the Lewis and Clark Expo. Why do you think lawmakers thought participation in the expo was important.
3. Why was it necessary to keep the apples in cold storage until time for the fair?
4. Compare the list of agricultural products on display at the expo with what you know about the main crops produced in Oklahoma today. Were any of the products on display surprising? If so, why?

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# Fairs in Government

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As you read the passage below, underline unfamiliar words. Discuss what the words might mean in your group and look them up in a dictionary.

Realizing agriculture's importance to the economy, Oklahoma's territorial and state government tried to modernize farming through educational programs and fairs. Laws passed by the territorial legislature in 1901 and by the state legislature in 1909 required all county commissioners to conduct regular Farmers' Institutes. Tax money could provide premiums in county-wide competitions of experimental work in livestock breeding and domestic science (now called family and consumer science).

At the turn of the century the federal government became involved in adult and youth vocational education, and the US Department of Agriculture's county agents (now called county educators) encouraged county fairs. Beginning with statehood in 1907 the agents worked with Oklahoma's Farmers' Institutes and rural boys' and girls' clubs, including 4-H, to prepare crop exhibits and livestock for county fairs and the state fair.

The 1917 Smith-Hughes Act provided funding for Cooperative Extension Service personnel to work more closely with 4-H (and later, Future Farmers of America and Future Homemakers of America) clubs. As a result, fairs increased in importance as an educational tool for rural youth.

## COUNTY FAIRS

In 2002 the legislature created an Oklahoma County Fair Enhancement Fund to support the county free fair system. Through it, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry allocates money to county fair associations and authorities through a matching grant program. The funds are dedicated for construction, facility upgrades, and premiums.

Winners of county fair livestock competitions may advance to both the Tulsa and Oklahoma City state fairs, but non-livestock winners may advance to only one. Oklahoma's Free Fair Law was amended in 1937 and 1947 and again in 2000 and 2002, expanding the system's funding methods.

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1. What is the main idea of the passage? What are the supporting details? How do the supporting details support the main idea?
  2. Why did Oklahoma's territorial and state governments think fairs were necessary?
  3. A premium is money paid to prize winners in fair competitions. Government officials provided tax money to pay fair premiums. Discuss whether or not this is a good use for tax money. Why or why not?
  4. List the laws mentioned in the passage that relate to fairs.

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# State Fairs

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As you read the passage below, underline unfamiliar words. Discuss what the words might mean in your group and look them up in a dictionary.

Prior to statehood, in January, 1907, Charles “Gristmill” Jones and Charles Colcord led in the organization of a state fair association. The organization located a new fairgrounds on the city’s east side and held the first State Fair of Oklahoma in early October, a month before official statehood day (November 16). Agriculture remained at the forefront, with prizes offered for crop and livestock competition, as well as several farming and ranching exhibits. Horse racing drew as many as 15,000 fans to the grandstand at the half-mile track for the Oklahoma Derby.

State fairs served as the top level of competition for winners of competitions at the county fair level. Besides the State Fair of Oklahoma, in Oklahoma City, there were fairs in Muskogee and Tulsa. The Muskogee fair evolved from the Indian Fair and became the Muskogee New State Fair in 1906. Tulsa’s community free fair, begun in 1903, by 1915 had evolved into the Tulsa State Fair.

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1. What is the main idea of the passage? What are the supporting details? How do the supporting details support the main idea?
2. What was the biggest attraction at the Oklahoma City fair? What do you think is the biggest attraction now? Why?
3. What were the locations of the three state fairs?