I. Westward Expansion

Teaching Idea

Students may enjoy hearing excerpts from letters and autobiographies of people who participated in the gold rush of 1849. One well-known set of documents is a series of letters by William Swain written to his wife Sabrina Swain and his brother George Swain. Another interesting document is the memoirs of Luzena Stanley Wilson. Excerpts from both the Swain and the Wilson materials can be found online. (See More Resources.)

Cross-curricular Teaching Idea

Have students do research on the California gold rush or another factor that influenced westward expansion. Suggest that they use online and print resources. Their final products could take the form of written or oral reports with accompanying artwork illustrating something learned from the research. Have students submit a bibliography (formal or informal) of the material they consulted to create their project and written report.

Teaching Idea

Tell students that many sports teams’ names are based on historical events. Find out the names of professional sports teams and see how many relate to history of the area (e.g., the San Francisco ‘49ers’ name comes from the gold rush of ’49).

Gold Rush and the ’49ers

In January 1848, John Sutter hired James Marshall to build a sawmill on the American River, which ran through Sutter’s property near Sacramento, California. As he worked, Marshall noticed in the riverbed shiny flakes that looked golden in the light. When he examined them more closely, he saw they were gold. Though the two men tried to hide Marshall’s discovery, word got out and the rush to find gold was soon on.

Californians took to the rivers and streams looking for gold. Much of it was easily found in streams and riverbeds by panning. Miners literally used pans with small holes poked through their bottoms. They let the water flow through the holes, and the heavy gold sank to the bottom of the pans.

By the following summer, 100,000 people arrived in California—not just from the east coast of the United States but from Europe and much of the Pacific Basin, especially China, as well. Most came overland by horse and wagon train, but many came by boat. Some sailed around Cape Horn at the tip of South America and up the coast, while others sailed to Panama, trekked overland, and took a ship again from the west coast of Central America.

The ’49ers, as the miners were called, were an enterprising group of men and women. Most miners were young men who expected to make their fortune and then return home. Some family men brought their wives and children along, expecting to stay. Single women, hoping to find gold or to earn money cooking or doing laundry for the miners, traveled to California as well. Some free blacks came, as well as some southerners who brought their slaves to mine for them. Even though few miners found a substantial amount of gold, many stayed for the climate and the rich farmland.

Native American Resistance

From the beginning, the new United States’ dealings with Native Americans resulted in a string of conflicts, misunderstandings, epidemics, skirmishes, wars, broken treaties, and unfulfilled promises. At first, the federal government recognized Native Americans as sovereign nations and negotiated treaties with them for their land. Sometimes these treaties were freely negotiated, and other times they were the result of wars. The Treaty of Greenville (1795) is an example of a treaty that was forced on the Native Americans as a result of war. The treaty, by which the native peoples of the Old Northwest (Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan) gave up most of their lands, was an outcome of the Battle of Fallen Timbers (1794). The Treaty deprived Natives of claims to roughly two-thirds of the land of modern-day Ohio. Federal troops under General Anthony Wayne defeated a force of Shawnee, Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Ojibwa, Fox, and Sauk near what is today Toledo, Ohio. Later, the War of 1812 would break the back of Native resistance in the rest of the region.

As more settlers pushed the frontier back by moving west and south from the original thirteen states, they came in contact with more Native Americans. Many European Americans considered the Native Americans uncivilized, and saw them as obstacles standing in the way of settlers’ ambitions. The settlers continued to push the Native Americans westward. Sometimes the army tried to prevent settlers from encroaching on Native American lands, but at other times the army
fought against the Native Americans. The conflict over land in the Southeast is an example.

The Native American nations of the southeastern United States—the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole—became known as the “Five Civilized Tribes” due to their adoption of constitutions, laws, and other aspects of culture deemed to be “civilized.” The Cherokee in particular adopted European American ways by becoming farmers and converting to Christianity. However, as the frontier moved south and west, settlers covered the tribal lands in the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida.

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson supported passage of the Indian Removal Act, which gave him the power to force the Native Americans of the Southeast to move to what was known as the Indian Territory, now part of the state of Oklahoma. The Choctaw left first, followed by the Creek and the Chickasaw. The last to leave were the Seminole after the Second Seminole War (1835–1842).

The Cherokee chose legal means rather than warfare to resist removal. In two lawsuits that went all the way to the Supreme Court, Cherokee rights to their lands were upheld. But President Jackson and the state of Georgia ignored both decisions, and seeing the inevitable, some 2,000 Cherokee agreed to move. By 1838, some 14,000 still remained in the Southeast. Jackson was no longer president, but his successor, Martin Van Buren, decided to enforce the move. The Cherokees’ forced march to the Indian Territory became known as the “Trail of Tears.” The four-month trek took place in winter and it is estimated that about 4,000 men, women, and children died along the way. The cost of the removal was subtracted from the money to be paid to the Cherokee for their lands, so they were left with $3 million.

The Cherokee and the other nations removed to Indian Territory were promised that this land would remain theirs forever. “Forever” lasted a generation. First, they lost part of their land to other Native American peoples whom the federal government resettled in the Territory in 1866. As the West filled up, there was pressure on the government to open Native American lands. In 1889, the Creek and the Seminole sold 50,000 acres to the United States for white settlement. By 1907, there were more whites than Native Americans in the Territory, and in that year, it was made part of the new state of Oklahoma.

**Tecumseh and the Battle of Tippecanoe**

In the first decade of the 1800s, the states and territories bordering the frontier believed that the British in Canada were aiding Native Americans who were attacking frontier settlements. Beginning around 1811, Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief, and his brother Tenskwatawa, tried to unite native peoples east of the Mississippi in a giant confederacy. The two men believed that if the Native American nations banded together and refused to sell land to Americans, they could hold back American settlement.

Tenskwatawa was known as the Prophet because he claimed to have entered the spirit world, communicated with the “Master of Life,” and returned to Earth with knowledge of how Native Americans should live. He said they had to renounce dependence on American trade goods and return to their traditional ways of living and hunting. Here are some of the things he told his people:
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. . . But now those things of the white men have corrupted us, and made us weak and needful. Our men forgot how to hunt without noisy guns. Our women don't want to make fire without steel, or cook without iron, or sew without metal awls and needles, or fish without steel hooks. Some look in those mirrors all the time, and no longer teach their daughters to make leather or render bear oil. We learned to need the white men's goods, and so now a People who never had to beg for anything must beg for everything! . . . Many of us now crave liquor . . . There are drunks in almost every family . . . We were fools to take all these things that weakened us. We did not need them then, but we believe we need them now. We turned our backs on the old ways. Instead of thanking the Great Spirit for all we used to have, we turned to the white men and asked them for more. So now we depend upon the very people who destroy us! This is our weakness! . . . And that is why Our Creator purified me and sent me down to you full of the shining [sic] power, to make you what you were before! . . . Do not eat any food that is raised or cooked by a white person. It is not good for us. Eat not their bread made of wheat, for Our Creator gave us corn for our bread. Eat not the meat of their filthy swine, nor of their chicken fowls, nor the beef of their cattle, which are tame and thus have no spirit in them. Their foods will seem to fill your empty belly, but this deceives you for food without spirit does not nourish you. . . . There are two kinds of white men. There are the Americans, and there are the others. You may give your hand in friendship to the French, or the Spaniards, or the British. But the Americans are not like those. The Americans come from the slime of the sea, with mud and weeds in their claws, and they are a kind of crayfish serpent whose claws grab in our earth and take it from us. . . . That is what the Creator instructed me to tell you.

General William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana Territory, was concerned about the growing influence of Tecumseh and the Prophet. In 1811, Harrison led 1,000 soldiers to the Shawnee village on Tippecanoe Creek, near what is now Lafayette, Indiana. Tecumseh was not there, but Tenskwatawa was. Although Tecumseh had warned of the dangers of engaging the military in fighting, Tenskwatawa still attacked Harrison's force at night. Before attacking, Tenskwatawa gave an impassioned speech in which he promised his troops that the white man's bullets could not hurt them. Fighting was fierce and neither side won a decisive victory, although Harrison burned the Native American village and declared that the Americans had won.

Harrison also claimed that his men had found British weapons in the Native American camp. This sent shockwaves around the country. For many years settlers who lived near the frontier had claimed that the British were arming the Native Americans from bases in Canada and encouraging the native peoples to attack American settlers. Now Harrison had given them a “smoking gun” that seemed to prove what they had long suspected. The “war hawks” used Harrison's claim to press for a war with Great Britain. This was one of the reasons for the War of 1812.

Tenskwatawa lost most of his supporters after the Battle of Tippecanoe, but Tecumseh continued the struggle. During the War of 1812, Tecumseh allied with the British. When he died while fighting in Canada, so did his dream of a Native American alliance.
Tecumseh's significance in the struggle of Native Americans against land-hungry American settlers can be seen in the following statement:

I am a Shawnee. My forefathers were warriors. Their son is a warrior. From them I take only my existence, from my tribe I take nothing. I am the maker of my own fortune, and Oh! that I could make that of my Red people, and of my country, as great as the conceptions of my mind, when I think of the Spirit that rules the universe. I would not them come to Governor Harrison to ask him to tear up the treaty [of 1809], and to obliterate the landmark, but I would say to him: "Sir, you have liberty to return to your own country."

The Being within, communing with past ages, tells me that once, nor until lately, there was no Whiteman on this continent, that it then all belonged to the Great Spirit that made them to keep it, to traverse it, to enjoy its productions, and to fill it with the same race, once a happy race; since made miserable by the White people, who are never contented but always encroaching.

The way, and the only way, to check and to stop this evil, is for all the Redmen to unite in claiming a common and equal right in the land, as it was at first and should be yet; for it was never divided, but belongs to all for the use of each. That no part has a right to sell, even to each other, much less to strangers—those who want all and will not do with less. The White people have no right to take the land from the Indians, because they had it first, it is theirs. . . . there cannot be two occupations in the same place. The first excludes all others. It is not so in hunting or traveling, for there is same ground will serve many. . . . but the camp is stationary. . . . It belongs to the first who sits down on his blanket or skins, which he has thrown upon the ground, and till he leaves it, no other has a right.

William Henry Harrison went from his "victory" at Tippecanoe to fight in the War of 1812. He was made a brigadier general and later promoted to major general. After the war, he ran for and was elected to the Ohio legislature and later to Congress. He also served as United States minister to Colombia. A popular military figure, even more than 20 years later, he won the Whig nomination for President in 1840. He and his Vice Presidential running mate, John Tyler, campaigned on the slogan of "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too!" At his inauguration in March 1841, Harrison caught a cold and developed pneumonia. He died a month later.

**Osceola, Seminole Leader**

Before his election to the presidency, Andrew Jackson had a long record of fighting the Native Americans of the Southeast. In the First Seminole War, Jackson invaded Spanish Florida in an effort to end Seminole raids into the United States. Weakened by war and in need of money, Spain sold Florida to the United States. By the 1830s, the Seminole had been forced south to live in the Everglades, a swampy area.

When the Seminole were told they had to leave Florida and resettle in Oklahoma, Chief Osceola and his supporters refused. It is said that Osceola stabbed the treaty with a dagger and declared: “This is the only treaty I will make with the white man!” By 1835, the Second Seminole War was underway. For two years Osceola and his warriors foiled successive American campaigns to destroy the Seminole. They did this even though they were outnumbered. Hiding in the

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*Teaching Idea*

Discuss with students why the nation might elect military officers as presidents. Our first presidents, George Washington, was a general, as was Andrew Jackson. As they will also learn, General Zachary Taylor, hero of the Mexican-American War, was elected president in 1848.

Other military leaders who became president were Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower.