

Johnny Appleseed | Lesson Plan

How did Johnny Appleseed contribute to westward expansion, and why is his legacy important to understanding American history?

Students will understand how Johnny Appleseed's actions during westward expansion supported settlers and embodied values like resilience, ingenuity, and generosity. They will evaluate his contributions and legacy in shaping American history and values.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and explain the who, what, where, when, and why of Johnny Appleseed's life and actions.
- Summarize key ideas and details from the text about Chapman's early life and journey to the frontier.
- Analyze how Johnny Appleseed's actions supported settlers and contributed to the success of westward expansion.
- Evaluate the importance of apple orchards to frontier communities.
- Determine how Johnny Appleseed's actions, traits, and legacy influenced American history and values.
- Create a visual representation of Johnny Appleseed's legacy using key details from the text.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Orchard:** A piece of land planted with fruit trees.
- **Frontier:** Untamed wilderness beyond settled land.
- **Settlement:** A community established in a new area.
- **Fertile Soil:** Rich, nutrient-filled soil ideal for farming.
- **Westward Expansion:** The movement of settlers west to explore and claim new lands.
- **Evangelist:** A person who spreads the teachings of Christianity.
- **Legacy:** Something handed down from the past, such as actions or reputation.

Educational Standards: CCRA:R.1, CCRA.R.2, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.R.10, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.W.7, CCRA.W.8, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.SL.5, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.6

Academic Subject Areas: Language Arts, History, Westward Expansion

What You'll Need

- PragerU Kids *Trailblazers of America: Johnny Appleseed* book (Download [Here](#))
- Worksheets: *Trailblazers of America: Johnny Appleseed* (Click [Here](#))
- Optional: Purchase the book from Amazon (Click [Here](#))
- One index card per student for Exit Ticket



Pre-Lesson Preparation: Reading the Book

For Teachers:

1. Teachers should assign the entire *Trailblazers: Johnny Appleseed* book as a pre-reading activity.
 - Depending on the schedule and grade level, this can be done as an in-class activity or as a take-home assignment.
 - Use this pre-reading time to introduce students to the themes of environmental stewardship, perseverance, and Johnny Appleseed's (John Chapman's) contributions to westward expansion and American history. An Introduction for Pre-Reading is included below.
2. Optional Pre-Reading Activities:
 - Vocabulary Preview: Introduce the key vocabulary terms (e.g., orchard, frontier, grafting, stewardship) using visual aids or an interactive activity like matching terms to their definitions. Discuss how these terms set the stage for understanding Johnny Appleseed's (John Chapman's) story.
 - Anticipation Guide: Provide students with a list of thought-provoking statements to agree/disagree with before reading, such as:
 - Johnny Appleseed was a myth, not a real person.
 - Planting trees was essential for settlers' survival on the frontier.
 - Johnny Appleseed's actions helped shape the American frontier.After reading, revisit these statements and see if their perspectives have changed.

For Students:

1. As they read the *Trailblazers: Johnny Appleseed* book, encourage students to:
 - Highlight or underline key events, challenges, and achievements in Chapman's life.
 - Note surprising facts or write down any questions they have about Chapman's journey.
2. Optional Student Task:
 - Ask students to jot down a list of personal qualities they think an explorer or pioneer like Johnny Appleseed would need to succeed. This will help them connect Chapman's story to broader values like perseverance and innovation.

Introduction for Pre-Reading (10 minutes)

1. Introduce John Chapman:

- Share the following key points about Chapman:
 - Johnny Appleseed's real name was John Chapman, and he was born on September 26, 1774, in Leominster, Massachusetts.
 - He became a legend for planting apple orchards across the frontier, helping settlers establish homes, and providing resources for survival.
 - His life spanned key historical events, including:
 - American Revolution
 - Second Great Awakening
 - War of 1812
 - The Panic of 1819

- Ask students the following questions:
 - *What do you already know about Johnny Appleseed?*
 - *Why do you think planting trees was so important on the frontier?*
 - *What kind of person do you think it takes to live outdoors and travel as much as Johnny Appleseed did?*
- 2. **Explore the Geography of Chapman's Time:**
 - Display a map of the 13 colonies and the **Northwest Territory** (pages 4-5 and 22-23 in the book).
 - Highlight the route that Chapman traveled, beginning with his home state of Massachusetts and ending in Indiana.
 - Note the places where Chapman planted apple orchards throughout this region.
 - Discuss the challenges of traveling in Chapman's time through regions that had:
 - Rugged terrain
 - Wildlife
 - Interactions with Native American tribes
 - Rapid rivers
 - Extreme weather conditions
 - Ask students:
 - What do you think motivated Chapman to venture into unknown territory?
 - What risks do you think he faced?
 - Brainstorm as a class:
 - List possible motivations for exploring the frontier on the board (e.g., adventure, land opportunities, helping others).
- 3. **Conclude with Context of Chapman's life during Westward Expansion:**
 - Explain:
 - During John Chapman's lifetime, the **Northwest Territory** (modern-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and beyond) was a rugged frontier, newly opened to settlers.
 - To secure land in this area, settlers often had to plant **orchards** as part of their contracts. John Chapman's work planting apple nurseries supported this requirement and helped settlers thrive.
 - Chapman's efforts symbolized the spirit of westward expansion: perseverance, resourcefulness, and a deep connection to nature.
 - Reading Focus:
 - Encourage students to think about this question as they read: What qualities do you think Chapman needed to succeed as a pioneer, traveler, and caretaker of the land during westward expansion?

Post-Reading Lesson Plan (one 60-minute class period)

Warm-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Re-engage students with the subject matter and transition into the post-reading analysis with a Rapid Recall and Connect Activity:
 - Prompt: Ask students to write down or share aloud:
 - One thing they remember about John Chapman.

- One challenge he faced.
 - One reason why he is remembered in American history.
2. Interactive Brainstorm:
 - Write students' responses on the board under three headings: Key Events, Challenges, Legacy.
 - Encourage students to build on each other's ideas.
 3. Transition:
 - Explain that the day's lesson will dig deeper into Chapman's life by organizing key information using two graphic organizers.

5 W's Chart: (15-20 minutes)

1. Hand out the 5 Ws graphic organizer to each student. Explain that the purpose of this activity is to analyze the key elements of John Chapman's life and accomplishments by answering the five key questions.
2. Go over each section of the 5 Ws Chart to ensure students understand what is expected. Provide examples to guide their thinking:
 - **Who:** Identify who the book is about. Add additional information that describes his role in history.
 - Examples: *John Chapman, aka Johnny Appleseed, pioneer, planter, entrepreneur, evangelist.*
 - **What:** Describe what Chapman accomplished during his life.
 - Examples: *Planted apple orchards, provided apple seeds and trees to settlers, warned settlers of attack, and evangelized the Gospel.*
 - **Where:** Identify the places where Chapman lived, traveled, or planted.
 - Examples: *Allegheny Mountains, Massachusetts, Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and the Northwest Territory.*
 - **When:** Record the time periods and important events in Chapman's life.
 - Examples: *1774–1845 (lifespan), late 1790s (began traveling west), 1812 (warned settlers during the War of 1812), early 1800s (Second Great Awakening influenced his faith).*
 - **Why:** Explore Chapman's motivations and reasoning behind his actions.
 - Examples: *Love of nature, desire to help settlers establish homes, belief in stewardship and care of God's earth and creatures, loved opportunity, commitment to sharing his Christian faith.*
3. Model Expectations:
 - Choose one or two sections to model for students. For instance:
 - Who: Write "John Chapman - Explorer, Pioneer, Evangelist." Ask students to come up with other roles he had from the book.
 - What: Write "Planted apple orchards." Ask students to come up with other accomplishments he made from the book.
4. Guide Student Work:
 - Encourage students to use evidence from the book, class discussions, and notes to complete their chart.
 - Allow students to work in small groups or pairs, brainstorming together before filling out their charts.
 - Circulate the room, answer questions, and offer prompts.
5. Class Discussion and Sharing:
 - After students complete their charts, facilitate a class discussion to share their findings.

- Create a master chart on the board, asking students to contribute ideas for each section.

Pioneer Legacy Profile: (15-20 minutes)

1. Hand out the Pioneer Legacy Profile graphic organizer to each student. Explain that the purpose of this activity is to understand John Chapman's contributions to westward expansion and his relevance to American history.
2. Define and explain the three sections of the organizer to ensure students clearly understand what is expected. Provide examples to guide their thinking:
 - **Values & Traits:** Students should identify personal qualities and values that enabled John Chapman to succeed as a pioneer, planter, and evangelist. Encourage them to consider how his character traits helped him thrive on the frontier.
 - Examples: *Resilience, generosity, compassion, faith, independence.*
 - **Impact on History:** Students will describe John Chapman's contributions to American history, focusing on specific actions that supported westward expansion and influenced settlers' lives.
 - Examples: *Planting apple nurseries across the frontier, providing settlers with apple trees, warning settlers during the War of 1812, spreading Christian teachings, and encouraging self-sustainability.*
 - **Lessons for Today:** Students will reflect on the relevance of John Chapman's story in the modern world. This section encourages students to consider what they can learn from his experiences and how his legacy continues to inspire.
 - Examples: *Lessons in generosity, simple living, dedication to a cause, supporting others in building a better future, and contributing to making apples an iconic American symbol.*
3. Model Expectations:
 - Use one example for each category to demonstrate how to fill out the organizer effectively. For instance, under "Values & Traits," write "*Generosity*," explaining that Chapman gave away apple trees and seeds to help settlers build orchards and secure land.
4. Guide Student Work:
 - Encourage students to use evidence from their reading, class discussions, and notes. Allow them to brainstorm individually, in pairs, or in small groups before completing the organizer independently.
5. Class Discussion and Sharing:
 - After students complete the organizer, facilitate a class discussion where they share their responses. Write key ideas on the board for each category to reinforce understanding and encourage collaboration.

Wrap-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Begin wrapping up the lesson by posing the following reflective questions to the class. Encourage students to share their thoughts and connect their answers to what they wrote in their Pioneer Legacy Profile organizer:
 - *Why do you think John Chapman is still remembered today?*
 - *What do Chapman's actions teach us about perseverance and helping others?*
 - *How might the lives of settlers have been different without Chapman's apple orchards and generosity?*

- *What values from Chapman's life—like generosity, faith, or simple living—do you think are still important in today's world?*
- 2. Reflection Exit Ticket: Distribute an index card or have students complete a short journal entry answering one of the following prompts:
 - *What is one thing about John Chapman's legacy that is most important for people to remember, and why?*
 - *How does learning about John Chapman help you better understand the challenges and triumphs of settlers on the American frontier?*
 - *If you were inspired by John Chapman's story, what actions or values would you embrace to make a difference in the world?*
- 3. Wrap up the discussion by connecting John Chapman's legacy to larger themes such as **perseverance, community, and stewardship**. Highlight how these values not only shaped the American frontier but also continue to inspire acts of kindness and environmental care in today's world.
 - Example Closing Statement: John Chapman's life shows us that making a difference doesn't require wealth or fame—it takes perseverance, generosity, and dedication to helping others. His work planting apple orchards helped settlers build homes and thrive on the frontier, and his legacy reminds us of the power of simple, meaningful actions to shape a better future.

Enrichment Activity Options

These activities are designed to extend learning by exploring the natural and technological aspects of Chapman's time using the "Field Guide to Great Lakes Animals and Plants" and "Field Guide to Great Lakes Weaponry & Technology" sections of the book. Teachers can use these options to encourage creativity, critical thinking, and hands-on exploration of Chapman's world.

1. A Field Guide to Great Lakes Animals and Plants:

- **Animal Research and Presentation:**
 - Assign each student or group an animal from the guide (e.g., Great Lakes Rattler, Wolverine, Bobcat).
 - Students create a visual presentation that includes the animal's habitat, diet, and significance to the Great Lakes ecosystem.
 - Encourage students to connect their animal to Chapman's life or the frontier experience.
 - Example: *How might pioneers have encountered these animals, and what would they have done to stay safe or use the animal for survival?*
- **Ecosystem Connections:**
 - Create a class ecosystem web that illustrates how animals (e.g., bobcats, wolverines) and plants (e.g., Michigan white pine, blue violet) interact with each other and their environment. Research and add more animals to the web from the Great Lakes region.
 - Include apple trees planted by John Chapman as part of the ecosystem. Discuss how the orchards he cultivated provided food for animals (like deer and birds) and helped settlers adapt to the frontier.
- **Wildlife Poetry or Art:**

- Have students write a short poem or create an illustration inspired by one of the animals from the guide.
 - Encourage them to include details about the animal's behavior, habitat, and appearance.
- 2. A Field Guide to Great Lakes Weaponry & Technology**
- **Tool Showcase:**
 - Bring in replicas or images of tools like the gimlet or screw press. Discuss how these tools were used in Chapman's time.
 - Ask students to brainstorm other tools that might have been helpful for settlers and compare them to modern tools.
 - **Apple Cider Science:**
 - Demonstrate how the screw press worked by showing a modern version (e.g., an apple juicer) or videos of cider presses in action.
 - Discuss the importance of apples for making cider and why cider was a staple for pioneers.
 - **Design a Tool:**
 - After exploring the tools and technology in the book (e.g., gimlet, screw press), guide students to investigate how pioneers like John Chapman innovated to overcome challenges. Students can design and test a seed-planting tool to simulate planting in different terrains, build a lever system inspired by a screw press to extract "juice" from a sponge, or model tree grafting techniques to understand how apple orchards were cultivated. Encourage students to think about the materials available on the frontier and how their designs would have been used to support survival and sustainability.
- 3. Cross-Sectional Project: Life on the Great Lakes Frontier.** Combine both field guides into a larger project:
- **Survival Plan:**
 - Pose a scenario: *"Imagine you're living in the Great Lakes region during John Chapman's time. What animals, plants, and tools would you rely on to survive?"*
 - Students create a presentation or poster detailing their survival plan, supported by information from both field guides.
 - **Resource Timeline:**
 - Create a timeline showing how settlers used the Great Lakes region's resources over time.
 - Include animals, plants, and tools as key points on the timeline.