

John C. Frémont| Lesson Plan

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

Students will understand John C. Fremont's pivotal role in westward expansion, including his exploration of the American frontier, contributions to mapping and settlement, and his influence on Manifest Destiny and American values.

Learning Objectives:

- Identify and explain the who, what, where, when, and why of John C. Fremont's life, expeditions, and actions.
- Analyze the challenges and opportunities Fremont faced and how they reflect the broader themes of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny.
- Summarize key ideas and details from the text about Fremont's life, expeditions, and influence on American history.
- Reflect on the relevance of John C. Fremont's contributions to exploration, settlement, and American values in today's world.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Manifest Destiny:** The belief in the inevitable and divine right of American settlers to expand across the entire continent in the 19th century.
- **Topographical Engineers:** A branch of the U.S. Army that existed from 1838-1863 and was tasked with mapping and surveying land in the United States.
- **Oregon Trail:** A 2,170-mile route that connected the Missouri River to the Oregon Territory. It was one of two main east-west wagon routes that settlers traveled during the 1840s-1860s.
- **Bear Flag Revolt:** A settler rebellion in northern California during the Mexican-American War. It led to the creation of the Bear Flag Republic, or the Republic of California, as an independent nation in 1846.
- **South Pass:** A part of the Oregon Trail in modern Wyoming that provided easy passage through the Rocky Mountains. The 20-mile-wide gap with a flat, sloping trail made wagon travel for settlers possible in the 19th-century westward expansion.
- **Great Basin:** A 200,000-square-mile area in North America that includes most of Nevada, half of Utah, and sections of Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon, and California.
- **Mexican-American War:** A war between the United States and Mexico from 1846 to 1848. The conflict began after a border dispute arose in Texas after its annexation. The Americans ultimately won the war, acquiring over 500,000 square miles of Mexican territory and pushing its borders to the Pacific Ocean.

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: John C. Frémont* (Download [Here](#))
- Worksheets: *Trailblazers of America: John C. Frémont* (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. Assign the John Fremont book as a pre-reading activity.
 - Depending on your schedule and grade level, this can be completed in class or as homework.
 - Use this pre-reading time to introduce students to the themes of exploration, cartography, and Fremont's pivotal role in American history. A short introduction is included below.
2. Optional Pre-Reading Activities:
 - Vocabulary Preview: Introduce the key vocabulary terms (e.g., Manifest Destiny, Oregon Trail, Bear Flag Revolt, South Pass, Topographical Engineers, Great Basin, Mexican-American War) using visual aids or an interactive activity like matching terms to their definitions. Discuss how these terms set the stage for understanding Fremont's story and his pivotal role in mapping and promoting westward expansion.
 - Anticipation Guide: Provide students with a list of thought-provoking statements to agree/disagree with before reading, such as:
 - John Fremont's reports made the West seem like an uninhabitable desert.
 - Mapping new territories was essential for westward expansion in Fremont's time.
 - Manifest Destiny was a purely positive force in American history.
 After reading, revisit these statements and see if their perspectives have changed, using examples from the text to support their new views.

For Students:

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

Introduction for Pre-Reading (10 minutes)

1. Introduce John Fremont:
 - John C. Fremont was born on **January 21, 1813**, in Savannah, Georgia. Despite losing his father at a young age and growing up without wealth or privilege, he became an explorer, topographer, and politician, earning the nickname "**The Pathfinder**."
 - Fremont led five major expeditions during the mid-1800s to map uncharted regions of the American West, including the Oregon Trail, the Great Basin, and California. His reports and maps encouraged settlers to move west, transforming perceptions of the frontier from a harsh wilderness into a land of opportunity.

- His expeditions took place during a time of significant national growth, spurred by Manifest Destiny—the belief that Americans were destined to settle the continent.
 - In addition to his exploration, Fremont played a key role in the Mexican-American War, helping secure California for the United States. He later became the first presidential candidate for the Republican Party in 1856, advocating against the spread of slavery.
 - Fremont’s life and work spanned critical historical events, including:
 - Westward Expansion (1830s–1850s)
 - Mexican-American War (1846–1848)
 - California Gold Rush (1848)
 - Civil War (1861–1865)
 - The early abolitionist movement
 - Ask students the following questions:
 - What do you already know about John C. Fremont’s westward expansion?
 - Why do you think mapping and exploring unknown territories were so important in the mid-1800s?
 - What kind of qualities or skills do you think an explorer like Fremont needed to succeed in his missions?
2. Explore the Geography of John C. Fremont’s Expeditions:
- Display the map of the United States from pages 10-11 of *Trailblazers: John C. Fremont*.
 - Trace the routes of Fremont’s expeditions, highlighting key locations such as:
 - The Oregon Trail
 - The Rocky Mountains
 - The Sierra Nevada Mountains
 - The Great Basin
 - Discuss the challenges Fremont and his team faced, such as:
 - Harsh terrain
 - Limited resources and extreme weather
 - Encounters with Native American tribes, both peaceful and hostile
 - Ask students the following questions:
 - What do you think motivated Fremont to take these dangerous expeditions?
 - How might his maps have helped Americans’ view of the West?
3. Conclude with the Context of John C. Fremont’s Role in Westward Expansion:
- Explain the following:
 - During John C. Fremont’s lifetime, the idea of Manifest Destiny inspired Americans to push westward, seeking new opportunities and land. Fremont’s expeditions provided critical maps, data, and reports that opened the door for settlers and helped shape the nation’s understanding of the frontier.
 - Fremont’s work symbolized the courage, curiosity, and commitment to discovery that defined westward expansion, and his actions continue to inspire explorers and leaders today.
 - Reading Focus:
 - Encourage students to think about this question as they read: *What qualities do you think John C. Fremont needed to succeed as an explorer, and how did his work shape the course of American history?*

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 C. Fremont.
 - One challenge Fremont faced.
 - One reason 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 John C. Fremont'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 C. Fremont's life and accomplishments by answering the five key questions.
2. This activity is designed to build a strong foundation of knowledge about Fremont's expedition, which students will use later to analyze their contributions and legacy in more depth.
3. 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, including those who played significant roles in the expedition.
 - Examples: *John C. Fremont, "The Pathfinder," Jessie Benton Fremont (his wife and collaborator), topographical engineer, Mexican-American war hero, topographer.*
 - **What:** Describe what John C. Fremont accomplished during his expedition.
 - Examples: *Mapped the Oregon Trail and South Pass, explored the Great Basin and California, promoted Manifest Destiny.*
 - **Where:** Identify the places where Fremont traveled, explored, or fought.
 - Examples: *South Pass (Wyoming), Great Basin (Nevada/Utah), Bear Flag Revolt (California), Rocky Mountains.*
 - **When:** Record the time periods and important events in Fremont's journey.
 - Examples: *1813 (Fremont's birth), 1842–1846 (expeditions), 1846–1848 (Mexican-American War), 1856 (presidential campaign).*
 - **Why:** Explore Fremont's motivations and reasoning behind his expedition.
 - Examples: *Motivated by Manifest Destiny, desire to promote westward settlement, strengthen U.S. territorial claims, and provide scientific data on geography, plants, and animals.*
4. Model Expectations:
 - Choose one or two sections to model for students. For instance:

- Who: Write "*John C. Fremont - Explorer, Topographer, Politician.*" Ask students to think of other people mentioned in the book, and the roles they played in westward expansion.
 - What: Write: "*Mapped the Oregon Trail.*" Ask students to come up with other accomplishments he made from the book.
5. 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.
6. 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 C. Fremont'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 the personal qualities and values that enabled Fremont to succeed as a leader and explorer. Encourage them to consider how these traits helped him overcome challenges and accomplish his mission.
 - Examples: *Patriotism, resourcefulness, charisma, leadership, ambition.*
 - **Impact on History:** Students will evaluate the long-term significance of John C. Fremont's expedition and how his actions influenced the development of the United States. Encourage students to think beyond *what he did* and focus on *why his accomplishments mattered* in shaping history and westward expansion.
 - Examples: *Fremont's detailed maps and reports of routes like the **Oregon Trail** and **South Pass** made westward migration safer and more accessible for settlers.*
 - *His explorations and reports fueled the belief in **Manifest Destiny**, encouraging Americans to view westward expansion as both inevitable and a national duty.*
 - *His documentation of the natural environment—plants, animals, geography, and atmospheric data—advanced scientific understanding and inspired future exploration.*
 - *His role in the **Bear Flag Revolt** contributed to securing California for the United States during the **Mexican-American War**, adding significant territory to the nation.*
 - *The expedition reports, co-written with his wife, Jessie Benton Fremont, romanticized the West and encouraged settlers to view it as a place of beauty, adventure, and prosperity.*
 - **Lessons for Today:** Students will reflect on the relevance of John C. Fremont's story in the modern world. This section encourages students to consider what we

can learn from his experiences and how his legacy continues to inspire exploration, perseverance, and leadership.

- Examples: *The value of exploration and curiosity, perseverance in the face of challenges, the power of vision and leadership.*

3. Model Expectations:

- Use one example for each category to demonstrate how to fill out the organizer effectively. For instance, under "Values & Traits," write "*Patriotism*," explaining that Fremont demonstrated a deep commitment to the United States by mapping new territories, securing California during the Mexican-American War, and supporting Manifest Destiny.

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 C. Fremont is still remembered today?*
 - *How might the United States' westward expansion have been different without John C. Fremont's maps, scientific discoveries, and leadership?*
 - *How do you think Fremont's explorations compare to modern exploration efforts, such as space exploration or deep-sea research? What traits or tools from his expeditions might still be relevant today?*
2. Exit Ticket: Distribute an index card or have students complete a short journal entry answering one of the following prompts:
 - *Which of John C. Fremont's values or traits do you think was most important to his success, and why?*
 - *How did Fremont's work influence the way Americans viewed the West, and what impact did that have on the country's development?*
 - *What lessons from Fremont's story can inspire you in your own life?*
3. Wrap up the discussion by connecting Fremont's legacy to larger themes such as resourcefulness, vision, and ambition. Highlight how these values not only shaped the American frontier but also continue to inspire collaboration, curiosity, and innovation in today's world.
 - Example Closing Statement: John C. Fremont's resourcefulness, vision, and ambition set the foundation for exploration, not just in his time but for all time. Today, his legacy lives on in modern explorers—whether charting the depths of the ocean, discovering new species, or venturing into outer space. His story reminds us that the drive to discover and understand our world is timeless.

Enrichment Activity Options

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

1. A Field Guide to the Rockies Animals and Plants:

- **Animal Research and Presentation:**
 - Assign each student or group an animal from the guide (e.g., Elk, Salmon, Mountain Goat).
 - Students create a visual presentation that includes the animal's habitat, diet, and significance to the Rocky Mountain ecosystem. They should:
 - Sketch the animal.
 - Note its behavior, diet, and habitat.
- **Native Plants and Animals Diorama:**
 - Students build a small diorama of the Rocky Mountains, Great Basin, or California region with labeled plants and animals from these areas. Include species like **mountain goats**, **elk**, and **salmon**, as well as plants such as **sagebrush**, **pine trees**, and **Fremont's cottonwood**.
- **Sagebrush Art and Description**
 - Provide students with Fremont's description of sagebrush ("a gloomy and somber appearance") and have them draw the landscape as he might have seen it. Discuss what might have influenced this description, such as the stark environment, harsh travel conditions, or his mood during the expedition.
 - Have students draw or paint the landscape Fremont might have seen, incorporating sagebrush and the surrounding terrain (e.g., rocky ground, dry soil, distant mountains).

2. A Field Guide to the Rockies Technology

- **Rebuild the Barometer Challenge**
 - Provide students with craft supplies (e.g., straws, plastic cups, balloons) to design a simple barometer. Discuss how Fremont relied on this tool for weather prediction and altitude measurement.
- **Navigational Tools Exploration**
 - Students examine a compass, sextant, and chronometer (use replicas or videos). Have them plot a simple "expedition" on a classroom map using these tools.
- **Design a Tool for Exploration**
 - Ask students to invent their own tool for navigating or surviving in the wilderness. They should explain its purpose, how it works, and why it would be useful for an explorer like Fremont.

3. Cross-Sectional Project: Chart the Uncharted (Combine both field guides into a larger project):

- **Create and Explore an Imaginary Territory**
 - Students will experience the challenges of Fremont's explorations by "charting" an imaginary uncharted territory, focusing on creativity, problem-solving, and strategic planning.

- Provide students with a blank map template or a large sheet of paper to represent an uncharted region (e.g., unknown mountains, deserts, or river systems inspired by the Great Basin or Rocky Mountains).
- Include some pre-drawn obstacles like jagged mountains, wide rivers, or barren deserts. Leave most of the map blank for student exploration.
 - Students draw their planned route through the map.
 - They write hypothetical challenges along the way (e.g., broken tools, bad weather, limited supplies).
 - They document their discoveries by creating detailed scientific notes about one plant or animal they “find” along the way. (You can provide images of real plants or animals from Fremont’s travels for inspiration.)
- **Design an Expedition Flag**
 - Students design a flag to “claim” their territory, just as Fremont planted the U.S. flag during his expeditions. Ask them to include symbols representing challenges or discoveries from their “Chart the Uncharted” activity.