

Other Forms of Conflict in the West – Wyatt Earp and the Gunfight at the OK Corral 1881

Lesson Objectives:

- To understand how the expansion of the West caused other forms of tension **between** settlers, not just conflict between white Americans and Plains Indians.
- To explain the significance of the **Gunfight at the OK Corral** in understanding other types of conflict.
- To assess the significance of **Wyatt Earp** and what his story tells us about law and order.

Starter Questions:

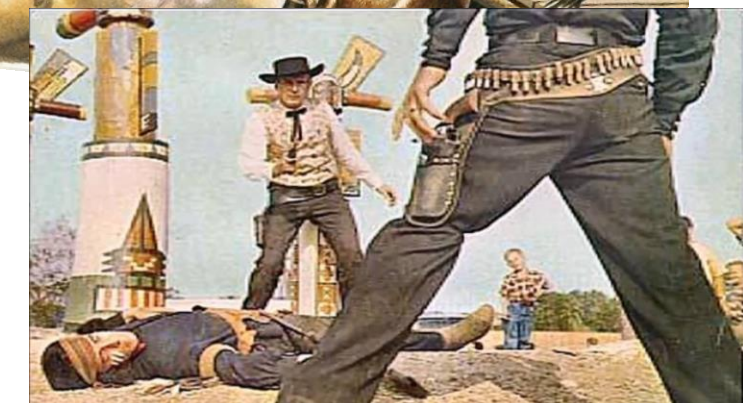
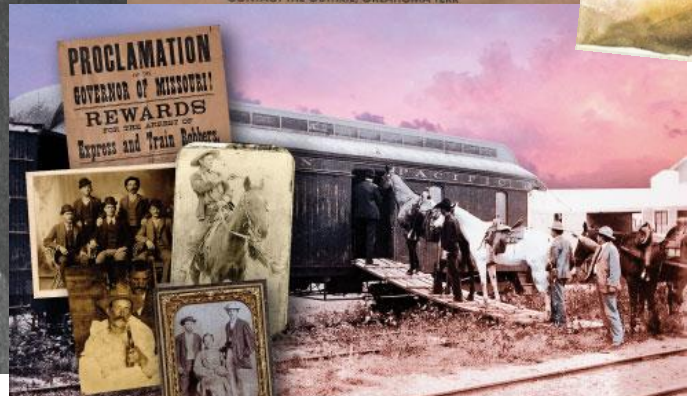
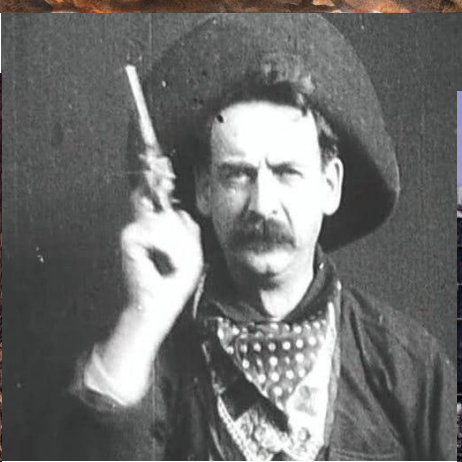
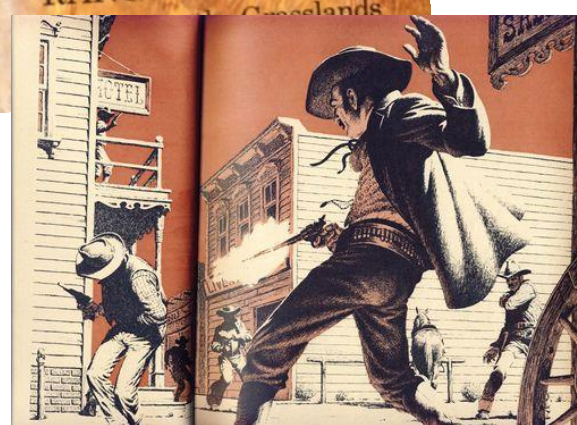
1) Give definitions for the following terms/key people to show their relevance to this part of the course

- **Pat Garrett:**
- **Vigilante**
- **Homesteader**
- **Rancher**
- **Prospecting**
- **Rustling**
- **Lincoln County**

As homesteaders, hunters, miners and cattle ranchers flooded onto the Plains, they not only came into conflict with the Plains Indians who already lived there, but also with each other. This was a time of robberies, range wars and Indian wars in the wide open spaces of the West. Gradually, the forces of law and order caught up with the lawbreakers, while the US army defeated the Plains Indians.

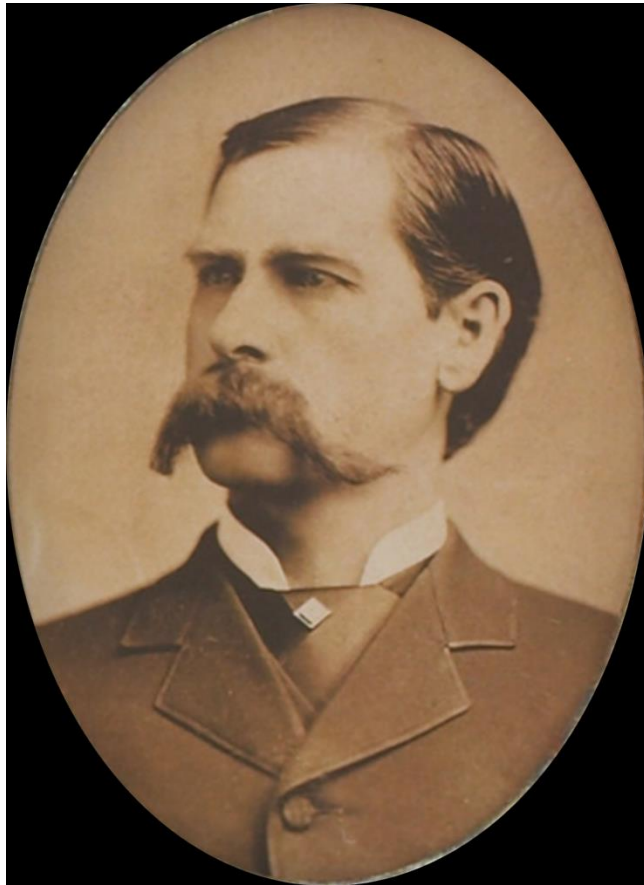


REWARD
\$500.00
FOR THE CAPTURE OF
Annie McDougal & Jennie Metcalf
alias
Cattle Annie & Little Britches
Wanted for cattle rustling and selling whiskey to the Indians. Known to keep company with members of the Doolin Gang.
CONTACT THE GUTHRIE, OKLAHOMA TERR.



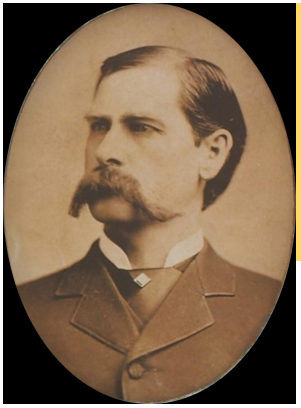
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Who was Wyatt Earp? What does Wikipedia say?!



Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp (March 19, 1848 – January 13, 1929) was an [American frontiersman](#) who appears frequently in a variety of well known stories of the [American West](#), especially in notorious "Wild West" towns such as [Dodge City, Kansas](#) and [Tombstone, Arizona](#). A hunter, businessman, gambler, and lawman, he worked in a wide variety of trades throughout his life. Among his many business ventures, he owned several saloons, maintained a brothel, mined for silver and gold, and refereed boxing matches. He is perhaps best known for his part in the famous [Gunfight at the O.K. Corral](#), an event which became famous in his own lifetime, and was later the subject of countless fictionalized accounts.

He spent his early life in [Pella, Iowa](#). In 1870, he married Urilla Sutherland who contracted typhoid fever and died shortly before their first child was to be born.^[2] During the next two years, Earp was arrested for stealing a horse, escaped from jail, and was sued twice. He was arrested and fined three times in 1872 for "keeping and being found in a house of ill-fame"



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Who was Wyatt Earp? What does Wikipedia say?!

By 1874, he arrived in the boomtown of [Wichita, Kansas](#) where his reputed wife opened a brothel.^[4] On April 21, 1875, he was appointed to the Wichita police force and developed a solid reputation as a lawman, but he was fined and dismissed from the force after getting into a fistfight with a political opponent of his boss.^{[5][6]} Earp immediately left Wichita, following his brother [James](#) to [Dodge City, Kansas](#) where he became an assistant city marshal. In the winter of 1878, he went to Texas to track down an outlaw, and he met [John "Doc" Holliday](#) whom Earp credited with saving his life.

Earp moved constantly throughout his life from one boomtown to another. He left **Dodge City** in 1879 and moved with brothers James and Virgil to **Tombstone**, where a silver boom was underway. The Earps clashed with an informal community of outlaws known as the Cowboys. Wyatt, Virgil, and their younger brother [Morgan](#) held various law-enforcement positions which put them in conflict with these '[Cowboys](#)' - [Tom McLaury](#), [Frank McLaury](#), [Ike Clanton](#), and [Billy Clanton](#) who threatened to kill the Earps on several occasions. The conflict escalated over the next year, culminating in the gunfight at the O.K. Corral on October 26, 1881 in which the Earps and Doc Holliday killed three of the Cowboys. In the next five months, Virgil was ambushed and maimed, and Morgan was assassinated. Wyatt, Doc Holliday, and others formed a [federal posse](#) which killed three of the Cowboys whom they thought responsible. Wyatt was never wounded in any of the gunfights, unlike his brothers Virgil and Morgan or his friend [Doc Holliday](#), which only added to his mystique after his death.

The Gunfight at the OK Corral and Wyatt Earp's Involvement 1881

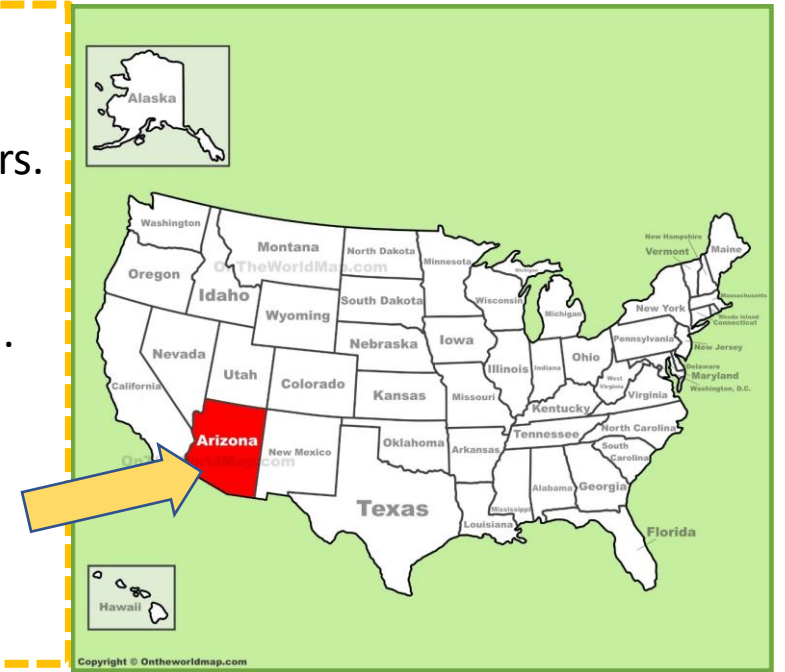
Causes

Silver was discovered in Arizona in 1877, and the mining town of Tombstone sprang up. As with all mining towns it faced issues of lawlessness and killings in its early years.

As the town developed a rivalry grew between two different groups in the town:

1) **The mine owners, businessmen and important citizens in the town (usually northerners)** and 2) **Small ranchers and cowboys (usually from the southern states).**

The first group wanted to attract investors and therefore wanted Tombstone to be a peaceful place for business. The second group were mainly Texan and confederate sympathisers. They rode into town for a good time - drinking, gambling and causing trouble. Although they were called the Cowboys, in reality they were cattle rustlers and thieves.



Narrative of events

Virgil Earp (brother of Wyatt) was hired as a Marshall for Tombstone to tackle lawlessness. His brothers Wyatt and Morgan came with him to serve as deputies. They all had a chequered past and had not always been on the right side of the law (see Wyatt Earp's Wikipedia entry!). To add to the tension, rivalry and violence in the town, a personal feud developed between the Earps and their friend **Doc Holliday** with some of the Cowboys especially **Ike and Billy Clanton** and **Frank and Tom McLaury**.

Events came to a head at 3pm on 26th Oct 1881. Virgil Earp had disarmed and pistol whipped Ike Clanton for going armed into the town (which was banned). Ike was also taken before the judge and fined. When he was released from the court, he met with his brother and the McLaurys and went to an ally near OK Corral. The Earps and Holliday walked down the street intending to disarm them. Instead firing broke out, both sides claiming later the other had started it. It was over in seconds. Thirty bullets were fired. Virgil and Morgan Earp were wounded. Of the Cowboys, Ike Clayton ran but the other three lay dead.

Results

In the immediate aftermath, Ike Clanton accused the Earps of murder. At the court hearing they were not convicted but there were people who thought that the Earps were responsible for the killings. A series of tit-for-tat killings followed as Virgil was ambushed in the street and seriously wounded and Morgan was killed, shot through a window while playing billiards.

In turn, Wyatt went after and killed more of the Cowboys. Opinion turned against the Earps as their violent approach to law keeping had only caused more conflict and Wyatt was viewed now as a murderer with no regard for the law he was supposed to be upholding. He and his remaining brother fled Tombstone.

However, the power of the cowboys had been broken and Tombstone became more peaceful – the mine owners and businessmen had won.

Despite Wyatt's very dubious reputation and actions, his story and role in the gunfight has been romanticised by Hollywood, with films and novels presenting him as the good guy and that the gunfight was a simple case of good v. evil – and that good won.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aE4h5rX9u3U>

Task:

Go back to the partially completed table you have from last lesson and add the events from today's lesson.



Task: Read carefully through the events of the Lincoln County war again, making sure you have understood key characters and the role they had. Then complete the relevant part of the table below

	Causes	Events	Results
Lincoln County War			
Gun fight at the OK Corral			
Tensions between homesteaders and cattle ranchers			
Johnson County War			

**Ok, I get all that
I think, but
what exactly is
a Corral?**



**Good Question!
It is an American word
for a pen or enclosure
to keep animals in
especially cattle or
sheep.**

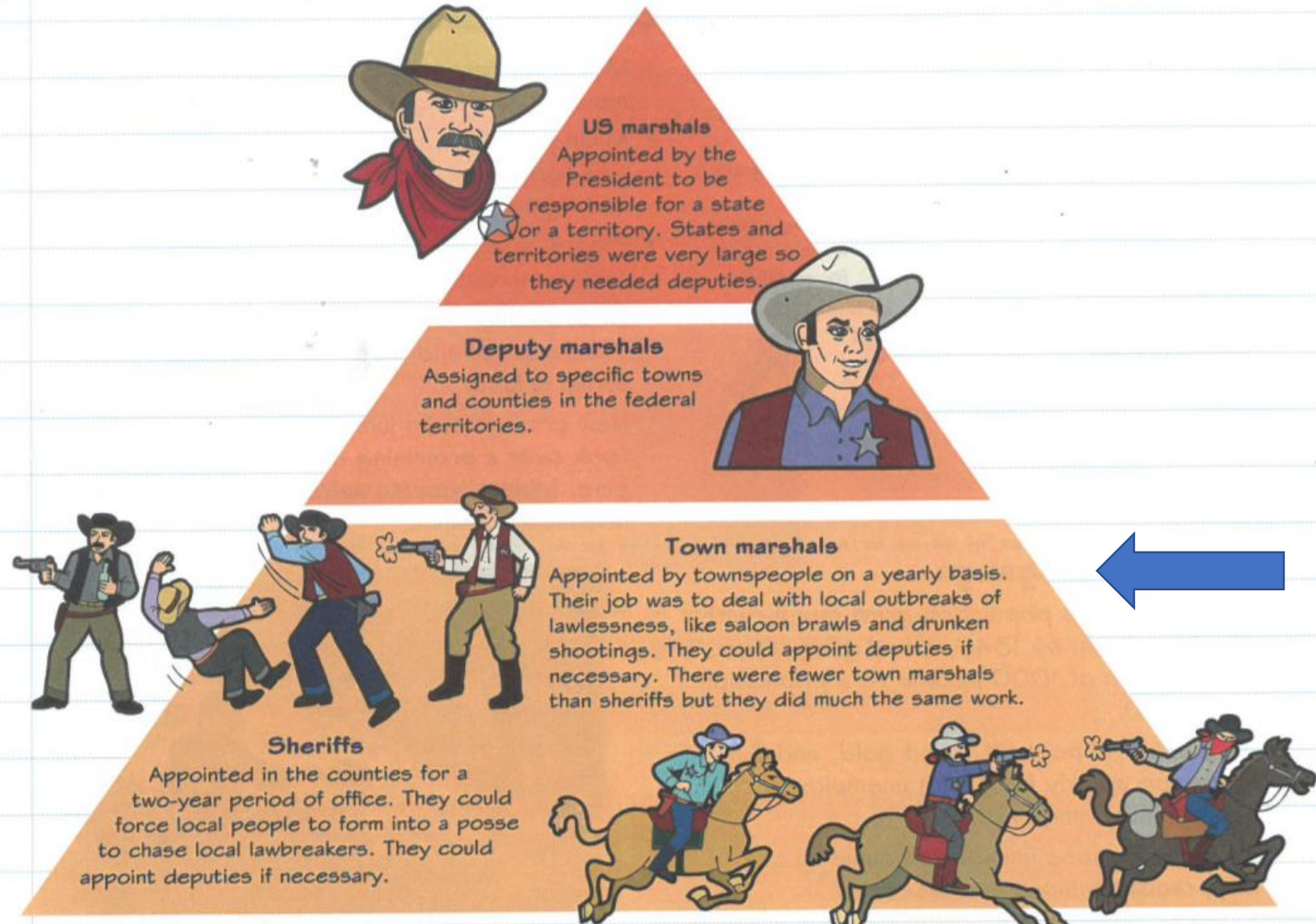


Reminder: What the structure of the law and order in the West before places became states?

Task:
If you do not already have a copy of this structure in your book, make a copy of it now!

Sheriffs and marshals

The federal government (government of the whole USA) tried to tackle lawlessness in the West, but there were many problems to overcome.



Virgil Wyatt's role
Wyatt and Morgan were his deputies

Extension Task

- Make two Top Trumps Cards for **Billy the Kid** and **Wyatt Earp**
- On one side have brief biographical detail about their lives
- On the other give scores out of /100 for:
 - Violence
 - Lawbreaking
 - Ruthlessness
 - Impact on the West
 - Importance in Life
 - Fame after death



TOP TRUMPS
PLAY + DISCOVER

	Causes	Events	Results
Lincoln County War (involving Billy the Kid)			
Gun fight at the OK Corral (involving Wyatt Earp)			
Tensions between homesteaders and cattle ranchers			
Johnson County War			



**TOP
TRUMPS**
PLAY • DISCOVER



**TOP
TRUMPS**
PLAY • DISCOVER