



Grade 3: Cotton in the Southwest Valley

Lesson Objectives

- Students will learn how growing cotton impacted Arizona.
- Students will identify major reasons why cotton growing developed in the Southwest Valley and Arizona.

Rationale

Cotton is one of the five Cs of Arizona. Although cotton has been grown in Arizona since prehistoric times, national and world events played a key role in making cotton a major pillar of the Arizona economy in the 20th century. This lesson explores some of the factors that made cotton an important Arizona crop and by example, how this sector of agriculture jumpstarted development in the Southwest Valley.

Background

Early in the last century long staple cotton was an essential ingredient in automotive tires. During WWI, tire manufacturers had difficulty obtaining cotton for tire production for two main reasons: wartime blockades preventing importation of long staple cotton from Egypt, and a devastating boll weevil infestation in the American south.

At that time, the United States Department of Agriculture was developing new varieties of Extra Long Staple (ELS) cotton at its experimental farm in Sacaton, Arizona on the Gila Indian Reservation. It was here that the US government's breeding program was being conducted.

Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company came to Arizona in 1916 in search of farmers who would grow this variety of cotton at a guaranteed price. The Salt River Valley had similar climate to Egypt and the completion of the Roosevelt Dam helped expand irrigation farming. When not enough farmers showed interest, Goodyear executive, Paul Litchfield, proposed the tire company purchase 33,000 acres in various locations in the Salt River Valley for growing cotton. Goodyear Tire and Rubber established the Southwest Cotton Company to carry out operations, and Litchfield Park was established as a company town along with a location in Chandler for company employees. Eventually all operations were consolidated to the Litchfield Park and Goodyear area.



This lesson has been designed to align with the following Arizona Third Grade Social Studies State Standards:

- 3.E1.1 Describe and discuss industries and occupations that have shaped Arizona. • Key concepts include but are not limited to the 5 C's (copper, cattle, cotton, citrus, climate), ranching, mining, farming, and tourism.
- 3.G3.1 Describe the movement of people in and out of Arizona over time. • Key concepts include but are not limited to factors contributing to settlement, economic development, growth of major cities, major economic activities, and land use patterns.
- 3.H3.2 Use primary and secondary sources to analyze the changes that have taken place in Arizona which could include the use of current events.

Lesson Essential Questions

- How do events in other parts of the world make an impact in places far away?
- What is the relationship between the characteristics of a place, such as geography and climate, and human activity in that place?

Vocabulary

Boll weevil: a small beetle with a gray body and a long snout. It lays eggs in the seed pods of the cotton plant where they hatch and cause much damage to crops.

Cotton: a plant that makes soft, white fibers which are used to make thread.

Durable: not easily broken or worn out.

Flexible: easily bent without breaking.

Long staple: having really long fibers.

Resident: a person who lives in a particular place.

World War I: also called the Great War, this was a major war fought mostly in Europe between the Allies, which included France, Great Britain, and the United States and the Central Powers, which included Germany and Austria-Hungary. It was fought from 1914-1918 and ended with the collapse of the Central Powers.



Warm-Up

Ask students if they can think of anything made out of cotton. Explain that cotton comes from a plant. Display pictures of the cotton plant in various stages. Explain that Arizona became an important place for growing cotton for several reasons.

Instruction & Activity

Show students the video, *Cotton in the Southwest Valley*. Ask them to look for the reasons cotton became important in Arizona, the name of the person who decided to grow cotton in the Southwest Valley, and names and places in our surroundings today that have to do with cotton.

Video Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1EzfWWCTEO>

Comprehension Check

1. Why did Paul Litchfield decide to grow lots of cotton in Arizona?
2. How did geography and climate influence this?
3. What are some things we can see today that remind us that growing cotton was important in the Salt River Valley in the past?
4. What things were included in the company town of Litchfield Park for the people who lived and worked there?

Extension Activities

- Have students create and draw a map a town that relies on one of Arizona's five Cs – copper, cattle, cotton, citrus, or climate. What will their town produce? Ask students to think about what the town needs for people to live there. What will they provide for people to do for fun in their free time? Will there be places for people to gather for community events? What other jobs and businesses will the town need to make sure people have what they need? Will there be doctors, schools, stores, community centers? Where will people's homes be located? As students develop their town, have them provide reasons for their decisions about what they include and where they place it. Have them decide on a name for the town that reflects something about the town's unique qualities.



- Teachers can explore other place names in Arizona with students with the online resources below.

Resources:

<https://www.arizonahighways.com/classroom/arizona-place-names>

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2016/05/28/how-phoenix-area-cities-got-their-names/84467058/>

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6230184c057849be8e30e11b2ea23f61>