



Teaching LGBTQ History

a project of Our Family Coalition

The Westward Movement and Charley Parkhurst

Author(s): Rob Darrow, EdD

Topics: Integrated; California Gold Rush and the Pony Express, Settlement Patterns – Movement West, Westward Movement

Grade Levels: Elementary School: 4th Grade, 5th Grade; Middle School: 8th Grade

Overview

This lesson plan can be adapted for use in 4th, 5th or 8th grade.

This lesson will increase student's understanding of Charley Parkhurst and his gender and important contributions in the context of the founding of California and the Westward movement in the mid-1880s. Note that the context of this lesson may be set in 4th, 5th, or 8th grade history content.

Time: 50 minutes

Lesson Objectives:

- Learn about the diverse people and genders who moved west and settled in California.
- Understand the important contributions of diverse people in the late 1880s.
- Understand the contribution and legacy of Charley Parkhurst.

Essential Questions:

1. What were the gender expectations of people in the late 1800s and what did some people do to change these expectations?

Standards:

HSS 4.3: Students explain the economic, social, and political life in California from the establishment of the Bear Flag Republic through the Mexican-American War, the Gold Rush, and the granting of statehood.

HSS 5.8: Students trace the colonization, immigration, and settlement patterns of the American people from 1789 to the mid-1800s, with emphasis on the role of economic incentives, effects of the physical and political geography, and transportation systems.

HSS 8.8: Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the West from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced.

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 7 P 68: To bring California's history, geography, diverse society, and economy to life for students and to promote respect and understanding, teachers emphasize its



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people in all their ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural diversity. Fourth-grade students learn about the daily lives, adventures, accomplishments, cultural traditions, and dynamic energy of the residents who formed the state and shaped its varied Grade Four landscape. There are multiple opportunities for students to learn what citizenship means by exploring the people and structures that define their state.

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 7 P 78: Teachers may read aloud excerpts from Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast*. The arrivals of Asians, Latin Americans, and Europeans are included as part of this narrative. Students can also explore how the gender imbalance between women and men in California during the Gold Rush era allowed women who wished to participate in the gold rush to pass as men and led to a number of men to take on women's roles. To bring this period to life, students can sing the songs and read the literature of the day, including newspapers. They may dramatize a day in the goldfields and compare the life and fortunes of a gold miner with those of traders in the gold towns and merchants in San Francisco.

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 7 P 79: Students may also read or listen to primary sources that illustrate gender and relationship diversity and engage students' interest in the era, such as Bret Harte's short story "The Poet of Sierra Flat" (1873) or newspaper articles about the life of the stagecoach driver Charley Parkhurst, who was born as a female but lived as a male and drove stagecoach routes in northern and central California for almost 30 years. Stagecoaches were the only way many people could travel long distances, and they served as a vital communication link between isolated communities. Parkhurst was one of the most famous California drivers, having survived multiple robberies while driving (and later killing a thief who tried to rob Parkhurst a second time).

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 8 P 125: Settlement touched diverse groups of people across lines of ethnicity, nationality, race, and gender. Pioneer women played many roles in coping with the rigors of daily life on the frontier. Biographies, journals, and diaries disclose the strength and resourcefulness of pioneer women who helped to farm the land and worked as missionaries, teachers, and entrepreneurs. The autobiographical works of Laura Ingalls Wilder provide a unique perspective on these topics. Some slave women gained their freedom in the West. Once established by Anglo-American settlers, many western communities and territories proved to be less beholden to eastern traditions, as evidenced by the territory of Wyoming granting women the right to vote in 1869, followed by Utah, Colorado, and Idaho. Mexican settlers also migrated into New Mexico, Texas, and California.

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 12 P 264: Frontier life had a mixed effect on the relations between men and women. White men far outnumbered white women, creating some opportunities where the latter became more valued than previously... This skewed gender ratio also led more



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white men to marry Mexican women with greater frequency in some communities in the American Southwest.

Primary-source documents will provide students of a more appropriate sense of the varied roles played by frontier women as students to continue to address the question: How did family life change during the first half of the nineteenth century? Many women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds felt trapped or limited by their gender in a place and time so dominated by men. Some women responded to this by working for social change.... Other women confronted this society by passing as or transforming themselves into men, thus benefiting from the greater opportunities men had in the West. California's Charley Parkhurst, for example, who was born as a female but who lived as a male, drove stagecoach routes in northern and central California for almost 30 years.... Finally, gold rushes and western military life provide examples of frontier settings where men far outnumbered women and for this and many reasons, people lived less conventional lives.

Vocabulary:

Westward Movement: The populating (by Europeans) of the land within the continental boundaries of the mainland United States, a process that began shortly after the first colonial settlements were established along the Atlantic coast.

Gold Rush: A rapid movement of people to a newly discovered goldfield. A major gold rush occurred in California in 1848-49.

Teacher Background:

Between 1840 and 1870 nearly 500,000 Americans crossed the continental United States to the western territories. The adventure of moving west was largely a man's undertaking while women were left at home tending the farm and the children. These were ordinary people caught up in an extraordinary adventure - traveling by wagon over 2,000 miles of plains and desert. Just 10% or 50,000 of these travelers were women, which meant the culture of early life in California was almost all men for a number of years. With the discovery of gold in 1849 and California becoming a state in 1850, this caused more people to move west to seek their fortune and to offer their services to developing state. One of these people who moved west was Charley Parkhurst. Charley became known as one of the best stagecoach drivers in California! Although Charley was well known it was only at his death that people learned that he was born with body parts that were considered female.

The lesson context may need adjustment depending on what grade this lesson is taught. This lesson allows students to explore and learn about gender in history, to consider gender expectations, and the important role of diverse people in the development of California.



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Materials:

- Computer
- Projector
- Slide Deck – Charley Parkhurst
- Worksheet: [Gender Expectations in the late 1800s](#)

Instruction:

 (Handouts and slides on website: queerhistory.pbworks.com/LessonLinks8th)

- Explain to students that they have been learning about the founding of California and/or the westward movement. Ask them if they know what gender most of the people were who moved west or settled California during the California Gold Rush.
- Students complete the “1850s Expectations of Gender” worksheet individually or as a group. Discuss the focus question with students.
- (Optional) Share photos of a stagecoach and the stagecoach map in California.
- Share the photo of Charley Parkhurst and ask students what they see in the photo.
- Tell the story of Charley Parkhurst (but don’t share the gender information until the very end). Use the slides from the website.

Discussion questions:

1. What surprised you most about the story of Charley Parkhurst?
2. How did Charley Parkhurst change gender expectations in the late 1800s?
3. Why do you think Charley lived his life as a man?
4. What were his contributions? And why is this important?
5. Do you think a person’s gender mattered in the late 1800s and if so, how?
6. Do you think a person’s gender matters today and if so, how?
7. How does a person’s gender impact history or our lives today?

Relevant Resources:

 (Resources on website: queerhistory.pbworks.com/LessonLinks8th)

Photo: Departure of the Mail from San Francisco, Harper’s Weekly, December 11, 1858 included in Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society, January 2014.

<https://scvhistory.com/scvhistory/ah5801.htm>

Photo: Map of Stage-Coach Routes, California, 1850s-1860s included in Stagecoach History: Stage Lines to California, California Department of Parks and Recreation.

http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=25066

Photo and Article About Charley Parkhurst (True West Magazine, July 1, 2004).

<https://truewestmagazine.com/the-three-charleys/>

Photo of Charley Parkhurst’s Grave (Pioneer Cemetery, Freedom Blvd. Watsonville, CA):

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charley_Parkhurst

The Strange Life of Charley Parkhurst.

<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/cruz/03.05.03/charley-0310.html>

Sierra Sun Newspaper.

<https://www.sierrasun.com/entertainment/the-arts/sierra-history-the-strange-tale-of-stage-coach-driver-charley-parkhurst/>

Books:

- Ryan, Pam Munoz. Riding Freedom. New York: Scholastic Press, 1998.
- Hill, Fern J. Charley's Choice: The Life and Times of Charley Parkhurst. Infinity Publishing, 2008.

Author(s) Information:

Dr. Rob Darrow is a lifelong Californian who works as an educational consultant in LGBT history, safe and inclusive schools, curriculum development, college and career planning, and digital learning. In addition, he works as Director of Research and Professional Learning with the Safe Schools Project Santa Cruz County and teaches a course titled "LGBT History in Schools" at CSU Monterey Bay. He has worked as an online school principal, adjunct professor, school librarian, and teacher in K-12 schools. His research interests include safe and inclusive environments for LGBT youth, LGBT history, blended and online learning, professional learning, creating a social presence in online courses, and school libraries.



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Worksheet: Gender Expectations in the late 1800s

The 1800s in the United States was a time when lots of people moved to the west. That means they traveled by ship or wagon train or horse to moves to newly developed states such as California, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, and Washington. With the discovery of gold in California in 1849, this caused more people to move and to seek their fortune. Think about the gender expectations of people in the late 1800s and who were the people who moved west.

Focus Question:

What were the gender expectations of people in the late 1800s and what did some people do to change these expectations?

Directions:

- Complete the table below. Under each category list the expected dress, behaviors, interests, appearance and anything else you feel was expected of people based on their gender in the late 1800s
- Circle the items that are the same for each gender
- Discuss the focus question

Boy/Man	Girl/Woman
Dress:	Dress:
Behavior:	Behavior:
Interests:	Interests:
Appearance:	Appearance:
More...	More...