

## Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Describe the requirements for homesteaders under the Homestead Act of 1862
- Discuss the hardships faced by homesteaders
- Defend their decision whether or not they would choose to become homesteaders

## Connection to Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- 2nd grade: 1.2.b, 1.2.c, 1.2.e
- 3rd grade: 1.2.a, 1.2.b
- 4th grade: 1.1.c, 1.2.c

**Materials:** Get Rich in Space flyer, Homestead game, dice

**Time:** 1 class period

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## Background

### Homestead Act of 1862

In 1862, the Homestead Act was passed and signed into law. The new law established a three-fold homestead acquisition process: filing an application, improving the land, and filing for deed of title. Any U.S. citizen, or intended citizen, who had never borne arms against the U.S. Government could file an application and lay claim to 160 acres of surveyed Government land. For the next 5 years, the homesteader had to live on the land and improve it by building a 12-by-14 dwelling and growing crops. After 5 years, the homesteader could file for his patent (or deed of title) by submitting proof of residency and the required improvements to a local land office.

Local land offices forwarded the paperwork to the General Land Office in Washington, DC, along with a final certificate of eligibility. The case file was examined, and valid claims were granted patent to the land free and clear, except for a small registration fee. Title could also be acquired after a 6-month residency and trivial improvements, provided the claimant paid the government \$1.25 per acre. After the Civil War, Union soldiers could deduct the time they served from the residency requirements.

Physical conditions on the frontier presented even greater challenges. Wind, blizzards, and plagues of insects threatened crops. Open plains and deserts meant few trees for building, forcing many to build homes out of sod. Limited fuel and water supplies could turn simple cooking and heating chores into difficult trials. While 160 acres may have been sufficient for an eastern farmer, it was simply not enough to sustain agriculture on many of the dry plains, desert scrub, and old growth giant forests of the west. Resource scarcity and geographical challenges made homesteading a great challenge. As a result, in many areas, the original homesteader did not stay on the land long enough to fulfill the claim.

However, homesteaders who persevered were rewarded with opportunities as rapid changes in transportation

eased some of the hardships. Six months after the Homestead Act was passed, the Railroad Act was signed, and by May 1869, a transcontinental railroad stretched across the frontier. The new railroads provided easy transportation for homesteaders, and new immigrants were lured westward by railroad companies eager to sell off excess land at inflated prices. The new rail lines provided ready access to manufactured goods and catalog houses like Montgomery Ward offered farm tools, barbed wire, linens, firearms, and even houses delivered via the rails.

Many pioneers populated the land, building towns and schools and creating new states from the territories. In many cases, the schools became the focal point for community life, serving as churches, polling places and social gathering locations.

Note: For information about African American homesteaders and ongoing research into their history, please see: the National Park Service <https://www.nps.gov/articles/african-american-homesteaders-in-the-great-plains.htm> and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center for Great Plains Studies <https://www.unl.edu/plains/homesteading-research>

## Suggested Procedure:

1. Distribute the Get Rich in Space flyer to the class and ask the students to read the information on the flyer
2. After students have read the information ask for a show of hands for who would be interested in taking up the offer.
  - a. Ask those who are willing to go why they would want to travel to such a dangerous place.
  - b. Ask those who are hesitating why they are reluctant to go.
  - c. What would be appealing about being one of the first to live on the new moon?
  - d. What would be the drawbacks?
  - e. Is there anything in the flyer that seems suspicious?
3. Discuss with the class what they think of when they hear the word “frontier.” Does this new moon count as a frontier?
4. Ask the class if they think the US government would ever give land away for next to nothing.
5. Show the class the following video: *The Impact of the Homestead Act of 1862* (4m 22s) <https://youtu.be/pQSCW1Sf-yA>
6. Divide the class into groups of 3-4 and explain the rules of the Homestead Game. Distribute Homestead Game to the students, and have each group play the game until they become successful landowners or fail while trying.
7. Choose a student from each group to tell their story according to the game. Ask the class for their impressions of life as a homesteader.



# GET RICH! BECOME ONE OF THE FIRST TO LIVE IN SPACE!

## Exciting Adventures Await You!

Scientists have discovered a new moon of Jupiter that is a delightful tropical paradise. The planet has an ample water supply and a wide array of resources for human inhabitants. Fruit and vegetables grow readily in the nutrient-rich soil. Early studies of the life forms already living on this moon have shown them to be friendly, intelligent, and curious.

For a limited time, the United States government is offering FREE LAND to all who are interested in moving to this new moon. All those who apply will be given a 160-acre plot of land. Those who live on the land for five years, build a home, and improve their surroundings will be given the land free of cost!

Experts predict that this will become the next hot travel destination in the near future. Get your plot now before prices skyrocket!

**Once in a lifetime  
opportunity!**

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**Thousands have  
already departed to  
take advantage of  
this offer!**

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**Available for a  
limited time only!**

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**Don't miss out!**

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**Make history today!**

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KENNEDY SPACE STATION**

Florida, USA  
1-800-555-0000

Contact for departure times  
and baggage restrictions.

## HOMESTEAD GAME

In order to benefit from the Homestead Act of 1862, a homesteader had to be the head of the household or at least twenty-one years old and be a US citizen or intend to become a US citizen. They had to live on the designated land, build a home, make improvements, and farm it for a minimum of five years. They also had to pay an application fee. If they met all of the requirements, the land was theirs. However, it was not as easy as it sounds. Homesteaders faced many hardships in their quest to become landowners.







This game should be played by small groups of students: at least two, and as many as six. Each student should be issued one die, so that there is the same number of dice as students in each “session” of the game. (Multiple sessions can be run simultaneously in the same classroom.)

Each session of the game should work like this:







- Each student rolls a die to see who goes first. Highest score is first roll, and then go clockwise from there.
- Now the game begins. Each player takes a turn in order. First, they roll their die, and then depending on the number they roll, they read off the accompanying story on the appropriate sheet. The other students listen to the story as read aloud, and comment on it as appropriate. Then it is the next student’s turn.

Keep playing until each student has rolled his or her die five times (one turn for each year), and read five corresponding stories, or until each student has failed in her or his attempt to become a landowner.

## Year 1: Getting Started







	<p><b>Roll a 1:</b> You decide to follow your dreams of owning your own land. You pack up your family and all of your possessions and take a train out West. Once you arrive you stake a claim on 160 acres of land. The land is rocky and difficult to clear. You are barely able to grow enough food to stay alive.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 2:</b> After seeing an advertisement in a local paper, you learn that the government is giving away free land! All you have to do is pay an application fee. You have always lived in the city, but you know that you can become rich if you grow the right crops. You stake your claim for 160 acres of land but soon discover that there is not enough water to grow crops. You decide to go back to the city. GAME OVER</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 3:</b> You are an immigrant from Germany who immigrated to America with the hopes of owning your own land. You stake your claim, but the climate is much different than you are used to. You struggle to survive, but you make it through the year.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 4:</b> You are a former slave looking to move away from the South and start your own farm. You have a lot of experience working on the land. You stake your claim for 160 acres. The weather is mild this year, and you are able to produce a small crop to support you.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 5:</b> You are a Union soldier who scheduled to leave report for duty in St. Louis. At a New Year's Eve party the night before, you met some local Land Office officials and convinced a clerk to open the office shortly after midnight in order to file a land claim. You become the first homesteader in America, and pick a good plot of land. You have a successful first year on your homestead with your family.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 6:</b> You are a woman whose husband died in the Civil War. As the head of your household, you decide to move your family out West to start a new life. You know things will be tough, but you are not afraid of hard work. The first year is tougher than you imagined, but you have no place else to go and are determined to stick it out as long as you can.</p>

## Year 2: A Harsh Winter







	<p><b>Roll a 1:</b> The winter was incredibly cold. The home you built yourself out of the rock, mud, and the small amounts of wood that you could find could not keep the cold wind out. Your best work horse died because of the frigid weather. When the weather warmed, you were able to grow enough crops for you and your family to survive, but not enough to sell.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 2:</b> You were able to build a nice shelter that kept out most of the cold. It was still tough, but you made it through the winter. You planted crops at the right time. You were able to grow enough for your family and have some to sell. Maybe this is the year you can buy a new plow.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 3:</b> You planted your crops too early in the year. A spring freeze killed off your investment. The nearest town is days away. Without food to feed your family, you fear that you all might starve. You decide to pack everything up and move back to the city where you are sure you can find work. <b>GAME OVER.</b></p>
	<p><b>Roll a 4:</b> During the harsh winter, your whole family got sick with the flu. The nearest doctor is days away. Even if the doctor was able to get to you in time, he might not have the proper medicine. Roll the die again. If you roll a 1, 3, or 5 you and your family get better. If you roll a 2, 4, or 6 <b>GAME OVER.</b></p>
	<p><b>Roll a 5:</b> You staked your claim in a canyon and built your small home up against the canyon wall. The rocks sheltered your home and your animals against the cold. Although you weren't able to grow a large crop, your dairy cow was able to produce enough milk and butter for you to sell in town and buy provisions. Hopefully next year will be the year your cop succeeds.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 6:</b> The winter was long and cold, and it also brought a lot of snow. You hope this will mean more water for your crops, but it brings a giant flood that washes away everything you own instead. <b>GAME OVER.</b></p>



## Year 3: Drought







	<p><b>Roll a 1:</b> This year the winter was mild, and your family was able to stay warm. It hardly snowed, and now the summer is hot. You can't remember the last time you saw rain. All of your crops died, and coyotes ate your chickens. You are not able to pay back the bank loan for your farm equipment, and they repossess everything. You head back to town to try and make a living some other way. <b>GAME OVER.</b></p>
	<p><b>Roll a 2:</b> It has been hot and dry all over the region this summer. Even the wild animals are having trouble finding food. Between the deer eating your crops and the mountain lions eating your livestock, you have to be watchful all of the time. It is a good thing you stocked up on cartridges for your shot gun the last time you were in town.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 3:</b> Even though the drought seems like it will go on forever, the river in your property still has plenty of water. While you are out digging irrigation ditches, you get bit by a venomous snake. There are no doctors or hospitals nearby. <b>GAME OVER.</b></p>
	<p><b>Roll a 4:</b> You were able to produce a meager crop this year despite the drought. By bringing water from a nearby river to your livestock they were able to survive and provide food for your family. If this drought lasts another year, you don't think you will make it.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 5:</b> The summer has been hot and dry. You have been hoping for rain, but when lightning struck the hillside nearby you began to panic. Roll the die again. If you roll a 1, 3, or 5, the lightning starts a fire that is quickly put out by rain, if you roll 2, 4, or 6 the wildfire destroys everything you own <b>GAME OVER</b></p>
	<p><b>Roll a 6:</b> You staked your claim alongside a river that has water year-round. You were able to dig irrigation ditches to bring water to your crops and your livestock. Your crop yield is even better than last year because the river is a more reliable source of water than rain. With some of the profit from this year's crops you are able to buy better field equipment and a new saddle for your horse.</p>

## Year 4: Life on a Homestead

	<p><b>Roll a 1:</b> There is so much that needs to be done each day. You rely on your land for everything you need. You wake up early in the morning and work until the sun goes down. It is exhausting, but you are able to make a profit on your crop this year.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 2:</b> It sure is lonely out here. You staked your claim very far from civilization. You have had to rely on your land for everything you need the past few years. You ask yourself, do I really want to live in the middle of nowhere without anyone to talk to for the rest of my life? And the answer is no, you do not. You decide to pack up and move to town where you can be around people again. <b>GAME OVER.</b></p>
	<p><b>Roll a 3:</b> One of your children broke her arm while doing chores. Her arm will heal, but that is less help for you on your land. Everyone else pulls together and works extra hard, but you only grow enough for your family to survive. Hopefully next year will be better.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 4:</b> Things were going well until insects came and ate your entire crop. Without any food or money, you are afraid that you will not survive another winter. You decide to pack up and go work for the railroad. <b>GAME OVER</b></p>
	<p><b>Roll a 5:</b> Earlier in the year, you looked on helplessly as a flock of birds ate almost all of the seeds you planted. Luckily, some of your seeds survived and were able to grow into healthy plants. Your crop is very small but should be enough for you and your family. You won't get rich this year, but you will be able to survive.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 6:</b> Your horse got stung by a wasp while you were out on your land. The horse reared up, throwing you from its back and then trampling you. Roll the die again. If you roll a 1, 3, or 5, you walk away with minor cuts and bruises, if you roll a 2, 4, or 6, your injuries are too severe <b>GAME OVER.</b></p>



## Year 5: The final stretch!

	<p><b>Roll a 1:</b> While out working on your land, you see a tornado touch down. You run for safety and hope for the best. Roll the die again. If you roll a 1, 3, or 5 the tornado misses your property, allowing you to have a successful growing season and apply to own your land at the end of the year. If you roll a 2, 4, or 6, your land and your home take a direct hit. GAME OVER.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 2:</b> You had a successful growing season. You produced enough crops to feed your family and produce a profit. Not only that, but your dairy cows produced enough butter and milk to sell in town. Later in the year, the new railroad came through and made it cheaper for you to ship your crops back East. At the end of the year, you are able to apply to own your land.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 3:</b> After an unsuccessful growing season, you are unable to pay back the bank loans that allowed you to buy your farm equipment. You are forced to declare bankruptcy and abandon the land. GAME OVER</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 4:</b> You struggled to make it though another year. While you didn't get rich, you were able to produce enough to survive and pay your bank loan. You are proud of your hard work. At the end of the year you are able to apply to own your land.</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 5:</b> The government broke another treaty with the Native people, which led to fighting. Your homestead is in the middle of the two factions. Instead of being stuck in the crossfire, you decide to cut your losses and move someplace safe. GAME OVER</p>
	<p><b>Roll a 6:</b> Your well becomes contaminated by your livestock. Everyone in the household becomes sick with dysentery. There is nothing the doctor can do because a treatment has not been developed yet. GAME OVER.</p>