

CHAPTER 8 / Using Song as a Primary Source

Cowboys often sang songs while guarding the herd, which helped soothe the cattle. Songs can sometimes tell you how people in another time or place lived. The words can help explain feelings and thoughts as well as describe places. “The Texas Cowboy” is a song by an unknown songwriter. Read the song and then answer the questions below.

The Texas Cowboy *(selected verses)*

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| <p>1 Oh, I am a Texas cowboy
Far away from home,
If ever I get back to Texas
I never more will roam.</p> | <p>5 I’ve traveled lots of country,—
Nebraska’s hills of sand,
Down through the Indian nation,
And up the Rio Grande;—</p> |
| <p>2 Montana is too cold for me
And the winters are too long;
Before the round-ups do begin
Our money is all gone.</p> | <p>6 But the Bad Lands of Montana
Are the worst I ever seen,
The cowboys are all tenderfeet
And the doggies are too lean.</p> |
| <p>3 Take this old hen-skin bedding,
Too thin to keep me warm,—
I nearly freeze to death, my boys,
Whenever there’s a storm.</p> | <p>7 All along the Yellowstone
’Tis cold the year around;
You will surely get consumption
By sleeping on the ground.</p> |
| <p>4 I have an outfit on the Mussel Shell,
But that I’ll never see,
Unless I get to represent
The Circle or D.T.</p> | <p>8 Come all you Texas cowboys
And warning take from me,
And do not go to Montana
To spend your money free.</p> |

—From *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*
(New York, 1922)

- (1) What is the subject of this song?
The song talks about the cold winters of Montana and how you don't make much being a cowboy.
- (2) Identify the physical features and locations mentioned in the song.
Places such as the Mussel Shell, Texas, Nebraska, and Montana.
- (3) What is the general mood of the person singing? What are the chief complaints of the singer?
The weather and the money made as a ranch hand were not what this person expected.
- (4) Many young men came to Montana to be cowboys. Do you think the feelings of this cowboy were shared by the majority of cowboys? Why or why not?
Some came to make fortunes in the livestock industry and some came to do the work required of them as a cowboy.