

Myths of Time: The Wild West!

Lesson Eight

Myth #1. Guns Were Rampant in the Old West

The Myth:

Well, even if cowboys didn't have cowboy hats, we know they had six-shooters on their hip! Back then, every man, woman, and child came pre-equipped with an old-timey revolver, which was used for everything from personal defense and hunting to celebrating. Everyone knows that! Right? Right?

The Reality:

Umm, actually regardless of the public's perception, gun control laws may have actually been stricter back in the 19th and early 20th century than they are now, especially in the West. In the beginning, there was definitely gun violence, as there was neither standardized law nor a good way to enforce it, but the Wild West didn't stay wild forever.

As towns formed and communities grew, the need for and tolerance of handguns started to fall. Starting in 1878, some 25 years into the westward expansion, action was finally taken -- even places as wild as Dodge City started posting signs like this:

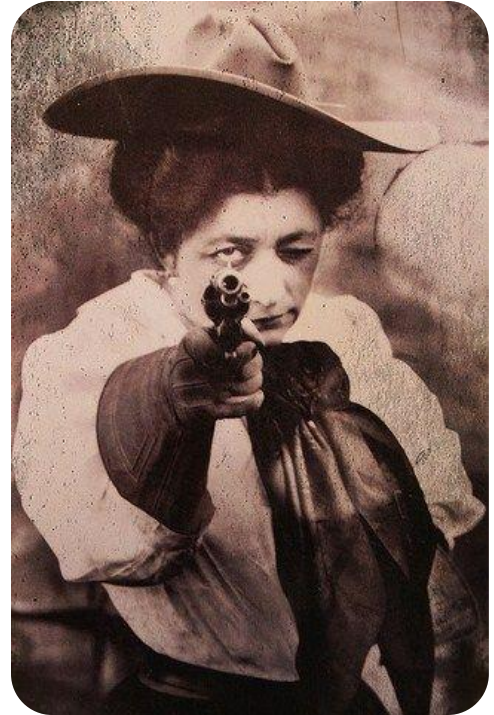


In fact, the

gunfight at the O.K. Corral was caused by one gang being unwilling to abide by the anti-firearm rule of Tombstone.

But it's not like the six-shooter of the time was very dangerous anyway (at least compared to modern weaponry, they were plenty dangerous in their own ways! It wasn't like they were tossing cotton balls.) They didn't use regular bullets like they currently do, instead opting for the so-called "cap-and-ball" system that was basically a metal marble launched really really quickly by burning black powder (plenty painful and potentially deadly). It

usually had an effective range of maybe 50 feet (which might still feel like quite a distance if you were



nearby and weren't sure where to run). The Adams, one of the first revolvers introduced at the time and a hallmark weapon of the era, would majorly burn your hand while launching the bullet. So you had to be really sure you wanted to shoot that dude.

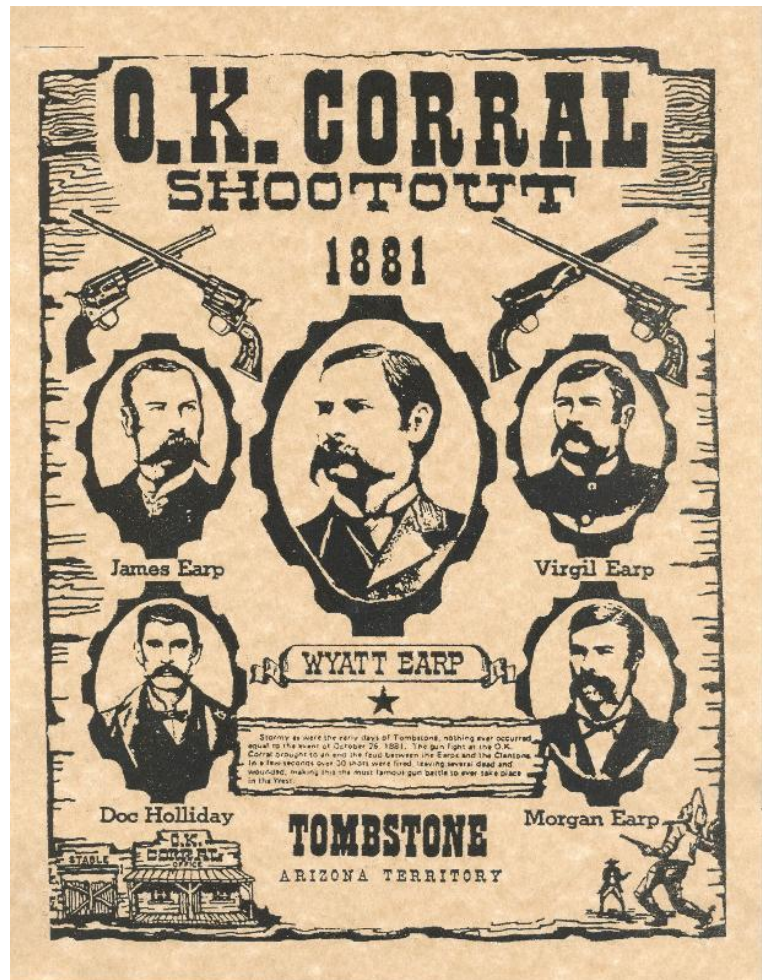
That's why, even among those who used guns, six-shooters weren't the favorite. They were little more than a weapon of last resort. Shotguns and rifles were the preferred weapons, having both the power and the range to put down a mountain lion or that guy who won't stop cheating at cards. But really, who would ever want to watch a Western where cowboys were meeting at high noon to shoot each other in the face with huge shotguns? Well, actually...

HIGH NOON...IN AN ALLEY BY FLY' PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO?!

A standup shoot-out was very rare, but not unheard off. Here's a few legendary tales we've heard...

Wild Bill Hickok and Dave Tutt had a shootout in the town square of Springfield, Mo. Just like in the movies, they faced each other off over a dispute about Tutt having taken Wild Bill's watch as a gambling debt and parading around with it (also there was bad blood due to them loving the same woman). They faced off and Tutt fired first, missing. Wild Bill killed him with one shot at a distance of over 200 feet (a phenomenal accomplishment today, even more astounding in the days of cap and ball pistols.)

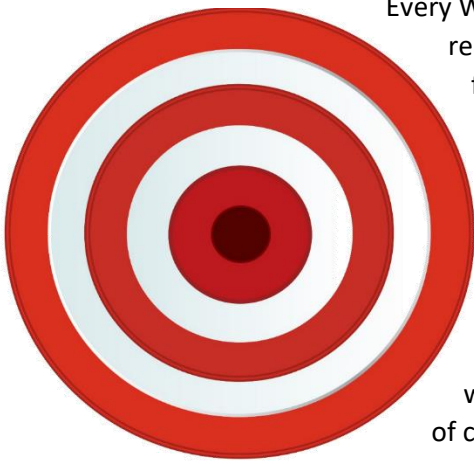
The gunfight at the OK Corral (though it actually occurred in an alley by Fly' Photography Studio) was like in the movies, in that the two opposing parties faced off, about twenty feet apart and shot it out. The Earps and Doc Holliday were there to disarm the Cowboys (as they were called), who were carrying guns in violation of a town ordinance. Both parties had holstered guns, or guns in their coat pockets, or guns on their horses. Likely, Doc Holliday cocked his shotgun, which started the shooting and after that it was "Saturday Night in Souix City." Only Ike Clanton and Wyatt Earp escaped without injury (Ike because he ran away.)



One last example would be the gunfight between Luke Short and Jim Courtright, where the two men met on the street and drew on one another. By a fluke, Short shot off Courtright's thumb and Short killed him before Courtright could switch to his left hand.

'DEAD EYE' TARGET

PRACTICE REVIEW GAME



Every Westerner needs to be ready to blast any two or four legged 'varmits' that cross their paths! To keep our skills sharp in this Wild West we're in students'll need to practice sharp shooting ping pong balls off the tees or hitting targets with their favorite blaster of choice (foam dart style or water gun).



MATERIALS:

- Targets with point values
- Ping pong balls
- Two low cost foam dart aka 'Nerf' style guns or water guns (one for each team)
- Foam Blocks for bases
- Skewers/Toothpicks (if using point/paper targets)



- Tape

Ask students review questions from the material covered/adventures we've had so far.



If they answer correctly, they can attempt to knock over targets or knock ping pong balls off golf tees with water guns or 'Nerf' style guns for points.



The targets can have designated points and if using the ping pong balls, you can assign a point value for each and give a designated number of shots/attempts allowed per question answered correctly.



SAMPLE REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Name the five myths we've studied.
- What was the gunfight at the O.K. Corral caused by?
- Were buildings built close together or far apart in Old West Towns?
- What did emigrants fear on the Oregon Trail?
- Where do you draw the eyes on a face?
- About how many pioneers died in clashes with Native American tribes?
- Does a hat keep you cooler in the heat?
- What valley were people trying to get to at the end of the Oregon Trail?
- How did people view portraits? Why didn't they smile? (There can be more than one acceptable reason. Ex. technology took too long AND people viewed them as serious and important.)
- What is the estimated number of emigrants that traveled the Oregon Trail?
- Name two reasons cowboys wear hats.
- How did Stagecoach Mary get her nickname?
- How long was the Oregon Trail in miles?
- How long would it usually take to travel the Oregon Trail?
- What country did cowboys and cowboy culture originate in?
- Name three of the six states the Oregon Trail crosses through.
- Were gun control laws common in the Old West?
- Do you lose 70% of your body heat through your head?
- There is evidence of how many true bank heists across 15 states in 40 years?
- Who was called 'the most famous black cowboy of them all'?
- What word did the word buckaroo come from?
- What is the 'hat that won the west'?
- What kinds of materials were Old West towns built from?
- What was the number one killer on the Oregon Trail?
- For everyday criminals, instead of banks common targets were what two things?
- What is a 'prairie schooner'?
- What is an essential part of investigating the universe? (ex. being wrong!)
- Who was Bass Reeves?







