

Grade 7 Informational

John C. Fremont: An American Explorer 1813–1890

In the early 1800s, many people believed the western plains were wastelands. John C. Fremont explored the region in the 1840s. He thought the plains were a very beautiful place with the tall, waving grasses and the wildflowers. Fremont made people aware of the value of the plains region.

Fremont’s Early Life

John C. Fremont was born in 1813 in Savannah, Georgia. He grew up in Charleston, South Carolina. As a student, he was very good at math and science. These subjects proved useful in the career he chose later in life.

As a young man, Fremont was hired as a mathematics teacher aboard a ship. He traveled to South America in 1833. A few years later, he helped survey a railroad line from South Carolina to Ohio. He decided to focus his career on surveying and exploring.

Becoming an Explorer

Joel Poinsett, a U.S. Representative, helped Fremont become an explorer. Poinsett arranged for Fremont to help the army draw an accurate map for a route through the southern Appalachian Mountains. Fremont traveled through Alabama, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, and parts of northern North Carolina. Fremont’s mapmaking ability impressed Poinsett.

Poinsett hired a group of mapmakers and land surveyors to explore farther west. He made sure Fremont was on the team. The group explored the land between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and Fremont wrote about the lands he explored. He described the plants and animals he found and explained the surface features of the land. He had the unofficial job of making the West sound like a good place for settlers.

The Pathfinder

Many years of Fremont’s life were spent exploring the lands in the West. He became known as “The Pathfinder.” One of the trips he took in the early 1840s made him quite famous. In 1842, Fremont and his group began exploring at the mouth of the Kansas River. Then they followed the Oregon Trail to the Platte River. They traveled along the Platte in boats. When Fremont’s group came to a part of the river that was bordered by towering canyon walls on each side, the water became very swift, with strong rapids. The boats were destroyed, but the explorers gathered as many supplies as they could. They walked along the Platte River valley. In October 1842, they reached a trading post at Bellevue, which later became a town in Nebraska. They decided to stay

through the winter.

In the spring of 1843, Fremont traveled lands that later became Kansas and Nebraska. Fremont sent a report to the military officer in charge of explorations, describing the lands and rivers of the places he explored. He called the Platte River by its Native American name—Nebraska. The word *Nebraska* means “flat water.” The officer thought Nebraska would be a good name for the entire region, and he made it the official name.

Fremont’s Influence

John C. Fremont had a notable influence on the settlement of the American West. Today, many cities and landmarks are named in his honor. For example, a dam was built at the canyon of the Platte River, near the place where Fremont’s boats were destroyed in the strong rapids. The dam is called “Pathfinder.”

A Fremont Days celebration is held each year in Fremont, Nebraska. Thousands of people take part in activities that celebrate Fremont’s influence on the settlement of the plains.

Grade 7 Narrative

Cooper, Susan. *The Dark Is Rising*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1973. (1973) From "Midwinter Day"

He was woken by music. It beckoned him, lilting and insistent; delicate music, played by delicate instruments that he could not identify, with one rippling, bell-like phrase running through it in a gold thread of delight. There was in this music so much of the deepest enchantment of all his dreams and imaginings that he woke smiling in pure happiness at the sound. In the moment of his waking, it began to fade, beckoning as it went, and then as he opened his eyes it was gone. He had only the memory of that one rippling phrase still echoing in his head, and itself fading so fast that he sat up abruptly in bed and reached his arm out to the air, as if he could bring it back.

The room was very still, and there was no music, and yet Will knew that it had not been a dream.

He was in the twins' room still; he could hear Robin's breathing, slow and deep, from the other bed. Cold light glimmered round the edge of the curtains, but no one was stirring anywhere; it was very early. Will pulled on his rumpled clothes from the day before, and slipped out of the room. He crossed the landing to the central window, and looked down.

In the first shining moment he saw the whole strange-familial world, glistening white; the roofs of the outbuildings mounded into square towers of snow, and beyond them all the fields and hedge: buried, merged into one great flat expanse, unbroken white to the horizon's brim. Will drew in a long, happy breath, silently rejoicing. Then, very faintly, he heard the music again, the same phrase. He swung round vainly searching for it in the air, as if he might see it somewhere like a flickering light.

"Where are you?"