

The following is reprinted from *There's No Place Like Home* book and was a party we gave Jedidiah when he was four years old. To relive our family trip that we took out west a year ago, I am planning to give this exact same party, only this time since the kids are older, I am adding the following: To these decorations I will be adding our animal furs, cowboy hats, cowboy boots, snake skins, saddles, lariats, and cowboy horse blankets. I will also be using the steer's skull, brochures, magazines, and books we purchased on our trip. On the wall, I will tack a map of the United States and surround it with pictures from our trip. This will be used for decorations and for another party game in which I will have the children locate the places we visited while out west.

The campfire will be a real one outside, and the food will be cooked over the fire. We will have target practice with our rifles, shoot clay pigeons with our shotguns, go horseback riding, and then eat after we come in from the range. After dinner, scavenger hunt, and games, we will look at photographs from our trip and then have a hayride followed by the sing-a-long around the campfire. For the next week, we will concentrate on scrapbooking with our trip's pictures, each child having their own scrapbook.

This party could be adapted for a Western Unit Study in which you study westward expansion, cowboys, cattle drives, ranches, horses, fur trappers, miners, the gold rush, pioneers, the cavalry, Indians, the plains, the desert, mountains, and all the wildlife indigenous to those areas. Besides all the books that are available on these subjects, I would also add travelogues on Colorado, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico and anything else you can find at your library.

If your children have never done any leather tooling, I would purchase a kit from a leather store and have them try several projects. You could also purchase a wood burner and have them create some wood burning projects as well. Purchase a lariat and have the children practice in the backyard. Josiah has a cowboy cookbook from which we try cowboy dishes. You could go on a camping trip or even camp out in your backyard. At a county park teach the kids how to track and navigate in the woods using the sun and landmarks. The ideas are endless, and I guarantee that the children will love it!

For Jedidiah's fourth birthday, we gave a Cowboy party. Yee-ha, it was fun!! A week before the party, we started watching all of our favorite John Wayne cowboy movies. We checked out most of the cowboy books in our library's junior section and started reading all about cowboys. I also used these books to gather information for our cowboy trivia game, historical readings, and for our cowboy sing-a-long.

The night of the party, we all dressed up like cowboys. I was the only one without a cowboy hat, so Heather braided my hair and tied the end in rawhide (Jon's boot string). I put more blush than usual on my cheeks and nose to make me look sunburned, because I had lost my hat during a stampede but I didn't lose any beeves. We all wore bandanas and our leather work gloves, because we just came in from a round up. When we reached my mom and dad's back door, we all whooped and hollered and

then greeted everyone with our howdys. Mom and Dad had our campfire waiting real logs with a yellow light bulb underneath. Logs were situated around the fire along with real lanterns and cook pots. I brought Jedidiah's grey sleeping bag for his bedroll and placed it next to the tent Dad made. I also placed Jedidiah's rifles against several of the logs. I then quickly decorated the table with cowboy tablecloth, plates, and napkins. For the centerpiece, I placed Jedidiah's extra pair of boots, his spurs, a foxtail, play handgun, bear claw necklace, and cowboy book.

When the grub was ready to be served, I beat a pie pan and yelled, "Come and get it." For our grub, I made chili and corn muffins, which we served in tin pie pans. We ate our meal while listening to cowboy tapes and country music. For dessert, we enjoyed the cake Heather and I had made. We put two 9 x 13 cakes together and iced them with sand colored icing. Heather made green cactus and also placed green tufts of grass here and there. I put on mini, brown M&M's for cow patties and used sliced Shredded Wheat for sagebrush. We then put on Playmobil longhorns and cowboys on their horses to look like they were rounding up longhorn cattle. The cake was adorable! Everyone wanted to know where we purchased it and couldn't believe I was the one who put on the cow patties. Hey, a little out of character but I always strive for the authentic at these family affairs.

After dinner, Jedidiah opened up his gifts, all wrapped in cowboy paper new guns and holster (now I can wear a holster, too), books on cowboys, chaps and vest, Indian headdress, plastic hunting knife, cowboy luggage, cowboy wallet, a badge, and cowboy and Indian Playmobil sets. We all played with his new toys for a while and then played cowboy trivia. To my delight, I found out that I married a real cowboy. Jon had by far the most Werthers for correctly answering the most questions. Yee-ha!

For our cowboy trivia game, I named a cowboy term in which everyone tried to guess its meaning. A few examples were: airtight = canned goods, can openers = spurs, fuzzies = ranch horses, maverick = branded animal with no known owner, outlaw = a horse that cannot be broken, wipes = neckerchiefs, beeves = full-grown beef steers ready for marketing, and punching = herding cattle. After everyone tried deciphering cowboy lingo, we played Fill in the Saddle with the correct answer. Here are a few of the questions I asked with the correct answers for your benefit: Horns of a longhorn had a spread up to 6 feet. On long trail drives with large herds, there was only 1 cowboy to 350 head of cattle. Night herders (men picked to guard the cattle) worked in shifts of 2-4 hours. Herds rarely covered more than 10 miles a day. Perhaps the greatest contribution the Spanish brought to North America was the longhorn cattle. This breed was ideal for survival on the plains. They descended from the Andalusian Cattle of the Arabs. Lasso or rope lengths varied from 26 feet to 70 feet. They were originally made from buffalo hide. Can anyone tell me how cowboys treat their ropes before using them? Place in warm sun til soft, stretch it between 2 posts to get the twists out, singe off the fuzz, and rub it with a soft cloth until polished and smooth. Name ways cowboys used their hats: To keep the sun off, keep the rain off like an umbrella, protect their ears, carry water to put out cooking fire, feed horses, use as a pillow by folding, and for a drinking cup. I then read selections from different books on the

Cowboy Era.

The children then went on a round up, rounding up the 50 head of plastic beeves I hid around the room. They used their cowboy hats for their finds. (Cowboy hats and bandanas were given as party favors.) After the round up, we sat around the fire and listened to me read a little history about cowboys songs and then sang cowboy songs from the sheets of words I typed up the night before. I selected Home on the Range, Yellow Rose of Texas, Buffalo Gals, Red River Valley, Get Along Little Doggies, The Dying Cowboy, and The Cowboy's Heaven. It was a lovely ending to a perfectly delightful evening.

I must take a moment to plug Playmobil fun sets. We have played with these adorable sets every day. Right now, we're getting ready to create a Texan plain on a large piece of plywood. We're painting the board with sand color paint with sand added to the paint for a sandy surface. At one end, we will paint a winding river with tiny rocks glued around its bank. More sand will be scattered on the plain and large rocks will become rocky mountains. Heather is making cactus out of modeling clay. I'm spray painting coarse fungus to look like sagebrush. When finished, we will all have fun setting up the Indian village, the fort, the ranch, stagecoach, wagon, cowboys on a round-up, outlaws, and the cavalry Playmobil sets with Lincoln Log cabins and fort.

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