



WHEN THE BIRDS GO SILENT

Classroom Guide

A Novel of the Mojave War, 1858-1859 · by C. V. Wooster · Kindle edition
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This guide helps grades 6-12 teachers bring the Mojave War of 1858-1859 into U.S. history, California and Arizona history, and Native American studies units. The history sections are drawn from the documented record. **The novel itself is written for adults and includes violence;** preview any excerpt before using it with students.

Background in brief

For centuries the Mojave, who call themselves Pipa Aha Macav (the people by the river), farmed the Colorado River floodplain where Arizona, California and Nevada now meet. In 1857 Edward F. Beale surveyed a wagon road along the 35th parallel that met the river at what became Beale's Crossing. In summer 1858 the Rose-Baley party, the first emigrant train on that road, reached the river. They cut cottonwoods the Mojave considered their own, and their cattle grazed Mojave land. On August 30, 1858 the river camp was attacked; the emigrants lost most of their livestock and retreated to New Mexico.

The Army responded. After a first expedition (December 1858 to January 1859), Lt. Col. William Hoffman returned in April 1859 with more than six hundred men and planted Camp Colorado on April 19, renamed Fort Mojave on April 28. At a council on April 23, 1859, the sub-chief Cairook offered himself as a hostage in place of the hereditary chief. He was killed at Fort Yuma on June 21, 1859 while helping other prisoners escape. After a battle on August 4, 1859, the Mojave made a lasting peace. The fort later became the Fort Mojave Indian School (1890-1931). The Fort Mojave Indian Tribe is headquartered in Needles, California today.

Key dates

1826-1827	Jedediah Smith reaches the river. The first American the Mojave ever saw arrives starving and is fed and guided west.
c. 1852-1856	Olive Oatman lives among the Mojave. A captive girl, taken by Yavapai raiders in 1851, is traded to the Mojave and lives with them for several years.
1854	The Whipple railroad survey. Lt. Amiel Whipple's survey crosses the Mojave Valley along the 35th parallel. Cairook and Irataba guide it.
Sept. 1, 1857	Battle of Pima Butte. A Quechan and Mojave war party is routed by the Maricopa and Pima near Maricopa Wells.
1857	Beale lays out a wagon road. Edward F. Beale surveys a wagon road along the 35th parallel from New Mexico to the Colorado, using imported camels.
Early 1858	The steamboat Explorer. Lt. Joseph Ives brings the small iron sternwheeler Explorer up the Colorado. Cairook and Irataba guide him.

Summer 1858	The Rose-Baley party heads west. The first emigrant train to try Beale's road leaves Albuquerque with families, wagons and a large herd of cattle.
Late Aug. 1858	Camp beneath the cottonwoods. The emigrants reach the Colorado and begin building rafts, cutting cottonwoods the Mojave considered their own.
Aug. 30, 1858	The attack at the river camp. The emigrant camp near the crossing is attacked. Twelve-year-old Sallie Fox raises the first alarm and is wounded.
Sept. 1858	The long retreat. With most of their livestock gone, the survivors turn back east toward Albuquerque.
Dec. 1858 - Jan. 1859	Hoffman's first expedition. Lt. Col. William Hoffman marches about fifty dragoons to the river. Near Beaver Lake his camp is threatened and his men fire.
Apr. 19, 1859	Camp Colorado is planted. Hoffman returns up the river from Fort Yuma with more than six hundred men and two mountain howitzers and plants a post on the east bank.
Apr. 23, 1859	The council and the hostage. Hoffman dictates terms inside a ring of soldiers. When the hereditary chief is demanded, Cairook offers himself as a hostage in his place.
June 21, 1859	Cairook dies at Fort Yuma. During a turn in the yard, Cairook seizes a guard so the other prisoners can run. He is bayoneted and shot.
Aug. 4, 1859	The one pitched battle. About twelve miles below the fort, Capt. Lewis Armistead's detachment strikes a Mojave force of more than two hundred.
1861-1863	Abandoned, burned, rebuilt. Fort Mojave is abandoned and burned early in the Civil War, then regarrisoned by California Volunteers in 1863.
1864	Irataba meets Lincoln. Irataba, who had argued against the war, travels east and meets President Abraham Lincoln in Washington.
1890-1931	The fort becomes a school. The old post becomes the Fort Mojave Indian School, where Mojave children were punished for speaking their own language.
1930s	The river is tamed. Hoover Dam, finished in the mid-1930s, ends the Colorado's annual flood that once laid fresh silt across Mojave fields.
March 2023	Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. The sacred mountain at the center of Mojave creation is protected as a national monument of about 506,814 acres.

Vocabulary

- **Aha Macav / Pipa Aha Macav:** the Mojave people's name for themselves, "the people by the river."
- **Emigrant:** a person leaving one region to settle in another.
- **Floodplain agriculture:** farming in silt left by a river's seasonal flood.
- **Hostage:** a person held to guarantee that an agreement is kept.
- **Sovereignty:** a nation's authority to govern itself.
- **Primary source:** a record created at the time (a journal, report or letter).
- **Oral tradition:** history preserved and passed down by speaking.

Lesson 1: Two sides of the river (1 class period)

Goal: Students explain the causes of the conflict from Mojave and emigrant perspectives.

- 1 Show the site's interactive map (themojavewar.com/#map). Locate the river, the crossing and the route.
- 2 Read the history page sections "The people by the river" and "August 30, 1858."
- 3 In pairs, students list what the river, the cottonwoods and the land meant to the Mojave, and what the road meant to the emigrants.
- 4 Discussion: Why could the same tree be "a cottonwood" to one group and "closer to a kinsman" to another? How do different ways of seeing lead to conflict?

Lesson 2: When sources disagree (1-2 periods)

Goal: Students compare accounts and explain why historical evidence conflicts.

- 1 Present three claims: (a) one man was killed at the river camp and about a dozen wounded; (b) John Udell counted eight dead and thirteen wounded, including the Bentner family; (c) Lt. Col. Hoffman came to believe Hualapai warriors, joined by only a few Mojave, did much of the fighting.
- 2 Present the two accounts of August 4, 1859: the Army counted 23 Mojave dead and 3 soldiers wounded; Mojave accounts recorded by historian Lorraine Sherer remember an attack on people in their fields, with a heavier toll that included women and children.
- 3 Students fill in a chart: Who recorded it? When? Why? What might they not have known or chosen to leave out?
- 4 Exit ticket: "What can historians say for certain about August 30, 1858, and what can't they?"

Lesson 3: Fort to school to language revival (1 period)

Goal: Students connect the 1859 fort to later history and to the present.

- 1 Use the site timeline (themojavewar.com/timeline), filtered to "Legacy."
- 2 Discuss: the same post where peace terms were dictated in 1859 became a boarding school (1890-1931) where Mojave children were punished for speaking their language.

- 3 Research: What is the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe doing today to keep its language and culture alive? Start with the Tribe's own website, mojaveindiantribe.com.
- 4 Reflect: What does it mean that a people was "broken but not destroyed"?

Teaching with care

- Use the Tribe's own resources and, where possible, Mojave voices. Avoid presenting Mojave people only in the past tense.
- Distinguish clearly between the documented record and the novel's invented scenes and characters.
- Be prepared for students' strong reactions to violence and to the boarding-school history.
- Names vary across sources (Mojave/Mohave, Cairook/Cairuk, Irataba/Arateve). Explain why.

Further reading

- Baley, Charles W. *Disaster at the Colorado: Beale's Wagon Road and the First Emigrant Party*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002.
- Udell, John. *Journal of John Udell, Kept During a Trip Across the Plains*. Jefferson, Ohio, 1868.
- Kroeber, A. L., and C. B. Kroeber. *A Mohave War Reminiscence, 1854-1880*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973 (Dover reprint, 1994).
- Sherer, Lorraine M., with notes by Frances Stillman. *Bitterness Road: The Mojave, 1604 to 1860*. Menlo Park: Ballena Press, 1994.
- Avillo, Philip J., Jr. "Fort Mojave: Outpost on the Upper Colorado." *Journal of Arizona History* 11, no. 2 (1970): 77-100.
- Ives, Joseph C. *Report upon the Colorado River of the West*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1861.

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