Daniel Boone and the Pioneers' Odyssey Into the American Heartland Lesson 1: Meet Daniel Boone and Enter Kentucky in the 1770s

Welcome to the White American history class at Bedrock College! We'll be kicking off this course with a series on the Pioneers. Pioneers are adventurous, resilient and courageous characters, driving into the unknown, surviving, exploring, and settling new places. This has captured the imagination and inspired children and adults alike. Few men's stories capture the essence of the pioneer better than Daniel Boone. Daniel Boone led the first White settlers into Kentucky. (French explorers were the first White people to discover Kentucky, but did not create settlements). When Daniel Boone arrived, Kentucky was a temperate and wild place full of awe inspiring wildlife including herds of hundreds of Buffalo, massive cane breaks, elk, deer, beavers, bears, and wolves. Kentucky was inhabited by Indians including the feared Shawnee tribe. During Daniel Boone's life the American Revolution broke out. The British worked with Shawnee Indians to attack American settlements in Kentucky, and paid Indians for American scalps. Daniel Boone was either 5' 10" or 5' 11" tall, had reddish sandy hair, wore a broad brimmed hat, attended a Quaker church, had a strong and simple Christian faith, was a skilled hunter, trapper, warrior, trailblazer, and survivalist. Daniel Boone enjoyed solitude. Daniel Boone abstained from using tobacco, but he did drink alcohol on occasion. His favorite books were the Bible and Gulliver's Travels. Daniel Boone married Rebbecca Bryan when he was 22 and she was 17. They had ten children.

Photo Credit: "Cumberland Gap" by David Wright featured in the Cumberland Gap Historical National Park Visitors Center

Daniel Boone's Early Life

The Boones were a Quaker family from Exeter, England. Boone's grandparents sailed to British Colonial America in 1734, and settled in Philadelphia. Daniel Boone was born the sixth of ten children, on November 2, or October 22, 1734 in Pennsylvania. Daniel grew up in a log house next to a spring in a mostly isolated environment. Daniel had almost no schooling. He spent his childhood taking care of cattle, hogs, sheep, harvesting crops, and hunting. During the French and Indian War in 1755 Daniel Boone volunteered to be a wagoner in a North Carolina Militia.

Photo Credit: "Daniel Boone Wilderness Scout" by artist Stewart White 1922 from https://jenikirbyhistory.getarchive.net/media/daniel-boone-wilderness-scout-1922-14766914285-846c15

Daniel Boone Gets Inspired to Settle Kentucky

Daniel Boone talked with John Finely who had been trading with the Indians about a fertile land with abundant game west of the Appalachian mountains and original thirteen colonies. In 1767 Daniel and his brother Squire Boone attempted to reach the hunting grounds but didn't make it. On May 1, 1769 Boone this time successfully found the hunting grounds, leaving his family and home in North Carolina with John Finley, John Stewart, Joseph Holden, James Monay and William Cool. The crew first glanced at Kentucky from pilot knob.

Photo credit: Flickr user Anthony
https://www.flickr.com/photos/26424952@N00/21483061009

As he heard, game including: ducks, catfish, salmon, mullet, fowls, turkey, deer and buffalo were living in abundance in Kentucky. Other animals included: great owls, bears, panthers, wildcats, rabbits, minks, beavers, otters, muskrats, and wolves.

Photo credit: Yellowstone National Park Flickr account
https://www.flickr.com/photos/yellowstonenps/18201136370

The scenery includes the beautiful Ohio river containing the Falls of Ohio. West winds often meant rain, while east winds usually meant clear skies. The soil was in fact fertile, loose and black with no sand. Plains and valleys bloomed with a variety of flowers. Southern Magnolias bloomed giving off a strong and elegant fragrance. There was an abundance of tall and thick canebrakes that were difficult to pass through. In Kentucky are the Mammoth Caves, one of the world's largest caves containing limestone arches, pillars, streams of water, and primal darkness. Inside the caves live: crickets, millipedes, shrimp, crawfish, cave fish and multiple species of bats.

(Canebrakes, a more common plant when Daniel was Pioneering Kentucky, canebrakes still exist but are more rare now.)
Photo Credit: Canebrakes from the Lexington Kentucky arboretum from wikimedia commons

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Group_of_Arundinaria_gigantea_at_Lexington_KY_arboretum.jpg

(Except there were no handrails when Daniel Boone and the Pioneers were pioneering Kentucky!)
Photo Credit: Entrance to Mammoth Cave National Park form picryl
https://picryl.com/media/mammoth-cave-f8fad4

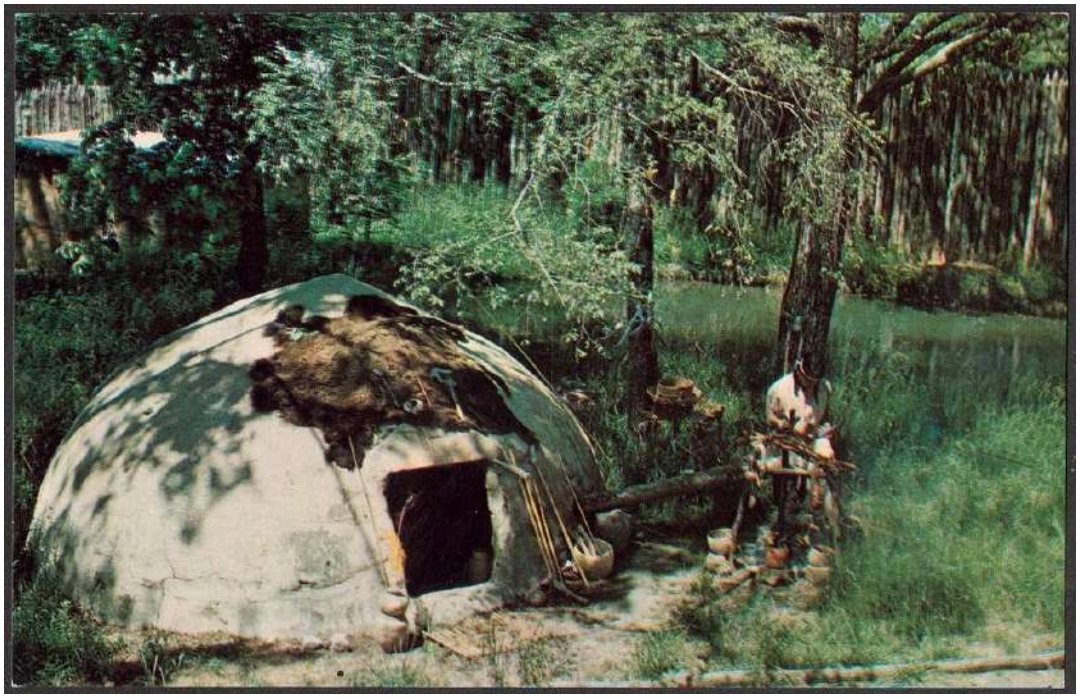
"No populous city, with all the varieties of commerce and stately structures, could afford so much pleasure to my mind, as the beauties of nature I found here."

-Daniel Boone from *The Discovery, Settlement And Present State Of Kentucky to Which Is Added The Adventures Of Daniel Boon 1784* By John Filson

The Indians (from John Filson's analysis)

Before the Pioneers settled Kentucky, the land was known as the dark and bloody ground. Many American Indian tribes traveled to hunt in Kentucky. Indian nations that ruled Kentucky when Daniel Boone arrived include: The Cherokee (the tribe that sold land in Kentucky to the Transylvania company), Delawares, Mingos, Wyandotts, Shawnee (Daniel Boone and the Pioneer's primary foe) , Gibbaways, Hurons, Tawas, Pilashaws, Vermilions, Kickapoos, Ozaw, and the Kakafky. At the time there was speculation that the Indians mostly migrated from Siberia. There was also speculation about a tribe that spoke a Welsh dialect, specifically the Kakafky tribe. The Indians often painted their faces, chests, and shoulders red. Deformed Indians were scarce. The Indians wore moccasin shoes. The Indians Daniel Boone fought had guns like the White American settlers. Unlike the Whites the Shawnee were also skilled at using tomahawks in battle. The tomahawks were used for multiple purposes. Outside of battle tomahawks were used as a hatchet. During battle tomahawks were used as a sword, or thrown from a distance. Shawnee Indians also hunted by throwing tomahawks.

Indian personalities generally had a duality, a gentle and amiable demeanor to those they considered friends and a ruthless demeanor to those they considered enemies. The Indians tolerated heat, cold, and hunger well. However in situations of excess many fell to gluttony and addiction to liquor. The Indians were more equal to each other than White Americans having less distinction at birth except for the Chiefs which were hereditary, but the Chiefs had limited authority. Indian nations were often at war with each other. Prisoners of war were treated cruelly, and were loaded with burdens. Many prisoners died but prisoners that outlived the trials were adopted in a family as a son, then treated with kindness and allowed the same privileges as the tribe's main stock. The Indians were skilled socially. Kentucky Indians lived in huts built with small logs or sometimes clay, covered in bark, with a chimney and door. Reeds were joined together to make tables and beds. Skins of wild animals were used as carpet. They did believe in a supreme God but believed him to be high above them and not concerned with mortal affairs. They also believed in an afterlife where they would be reunited with their friends in a paradise. There were festivals where Indians would wear disguises, sing and dance in a ring around a fire with tobacco thrown on. Murder, theft, and adultery were abhorred within the Indian nations. The Wyandotts were an exception, they were Roman Catholic when Daniel Boone arrived. The Wyandotts had a minister, buried their dead, and prayed zealously.



A Cherokee built wigwam, a typical style of building for Kentucky Indians
Photo credit: picryl photo of Cherokee medicine man
https://picryl.com/media/a-cherokee-medicine-man-or-didahnvwisg-i-a67f39

The Pioneers

In the 1784 book *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucky to Which is Added the Adventures of Daniel Boon,* it is reported by John Filson that 30,000 pioneers settled in Kentucky. These pioneers were mostly White, and judging by the last names overwhelmingly having ancestors from the British Isles, there were also Black American slaves living amongst the Pioneers, there was at least one Jewish Pioneer Samuel Sanders, another early Pioneer James Sadowski sounds like he had Polish ancestors, Pioneer Michael Shirley was a German immigrant. The Indians referred to the Pioneers as "the White man, or White Flesh" giving an insight into what a typical Pioneer looked like. The settlement was organized by the Transylvania Company. The owner of the Transylvania Company was Richard Henderson. The company bought land in Kentucky from the Cherokee, hired Daniel Boone to create the Wilderness road and lead settlers into Kentucky, built forts and sold lots to the Pioneers. The Pioneers lived in cabins made of wood. These settlers were described as "polite, humane, hospitable, and very compliant." Unlike New England where Puritans dominated the culture and Pennsylvania where the Quakers dominated the culture, in the pioneer days, Kentucky hosted a mix of denominations, most prominently the Anabaptists and Presbyterians. These new Kentuckians also had differing manners, and customs. Over time a more coherent Kentucky culture formed. One advantage the Pioneers had over the Indians was better forts that made Pioneer settlements more defensible than Indian villages.

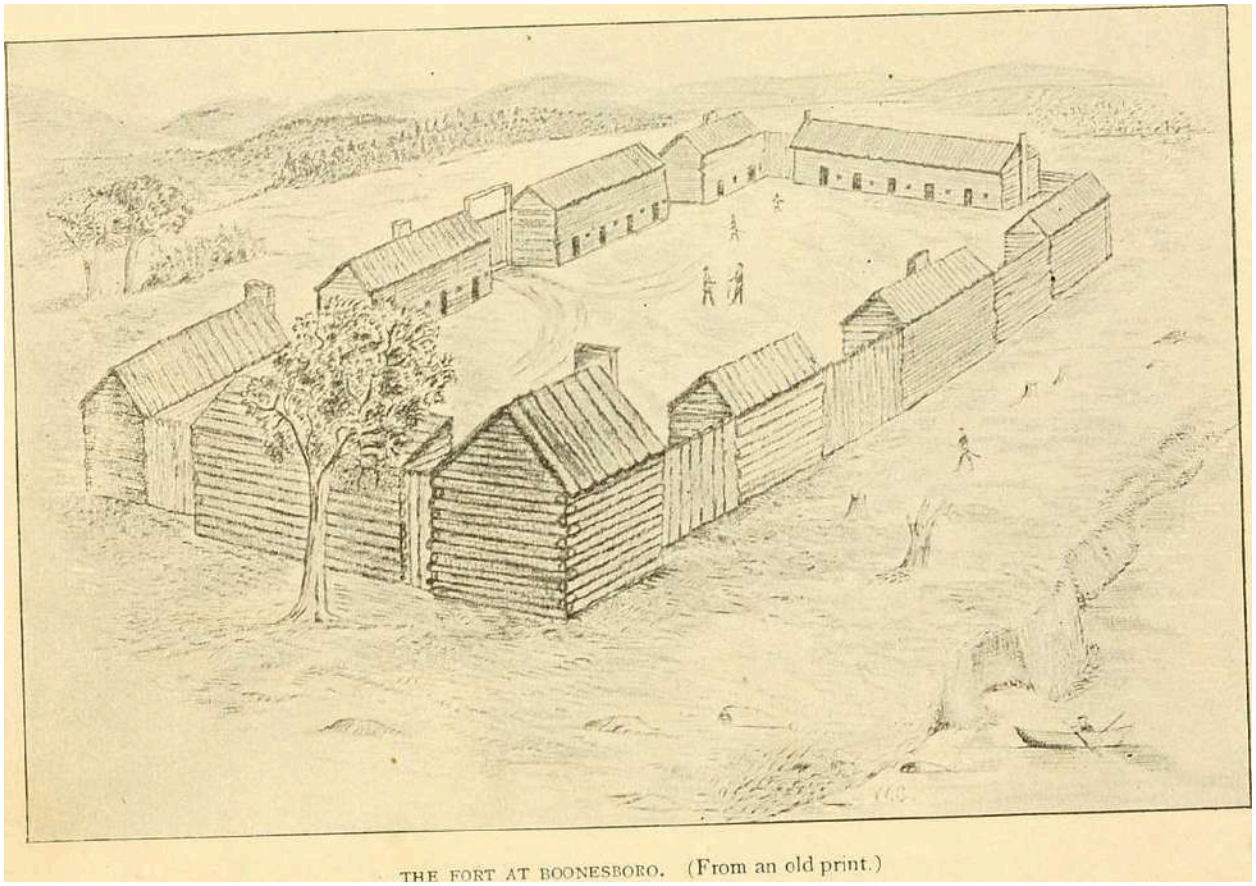


Photo credit: From picryl from the book "Stories of American pioneers- Daniel Boone, Lewis and Clark, Fremont, Kit Carson 1897"
https://picryl.com/media/stories-of-american-pioneers-daniel-boone-lewis-and-clark-fremont-kit-carson-d9a4c4

Here's a quote from Daniel Boone that really shows the personality of the man and his motivations for settling Kentucky. He does use the word "savages" to refer to the previous inhabitants of Kentucky. We need to add that the term had a behavioral and civilizational development aspect to it, not merely an ethnic slur. Daniel Boone also refers to the previous inhabitants of Kentucky as Indians. At Bedrock college we discourage students calling American Indians Savages, unless someone does something like kidnap your daughter then by all means call that savage a savage!

"Curiosity is natural to the soul of man, and interesting objects have a powerful influence on our affections. Let these influencing powers actuate,

by the permission or the disposal of Providence, from selfish or social views, yet in time the mysterious will of Heaven is unfolded, and we behold our conduct, from what forever motives excited, operating to answer the important designs of heaven. Thus we behold Kentucky, lately a howling wilderness, the habitation of savages and wild beasts, become a fruitful field ; this region, so favorably distinguished by nature, now become the habitation of civilization, at a period unparalleled in history, in the midst of a raging war, and under all the disadvantages of emigration to a country so remote from the inhabited parts of the continent. Here, where the hand of violence shed the blood of the innocent; where the horrid yells of savages, and the groans of the distressed, founded in our ears, we now hear praises and adorations of our Creator ; where wretched wigwams stood, the miserable abodes of savages, we

behold the foundations of cities laid, that in all probability, will rival the glory of the greatest upon earth. And we view Kentucky situated on the fertile banks of the great Ohio, rising from obscurity to shine with splendor, equal to any other of the stars of the American hemisphere.

The settling of this region well deserves a place in history."

-Daniel Boone recorded by John Filson

*Typos have been corrected, to read the quote with original typos see the end of this lesson

Daniel Boone gets captured by Shawnee Indians

On February 7, 1778 Daniel Boone was hunting to obtain meat for his company. During his hunt Boone ran into a group of 102 Indians along with two Frenchmen. They were marching towards Boonesborough, an American settlement. A chase began as the Indians worked together to capture Boone. The pursuit ended in Boone being captured. 8 days later Boone was taken to the Blue Licks. 27 of Boone's party members were already there. They had previously surrendered to the Indians. The Americans were taken to the Shawnee town of Chelicothe. The Shawnee must have liked, or wanted to use Daniel for some purpose because Daniel became a son to a Shawnee family and given a new name Big Turtle. When Daniel interacted with the Shawnees he appeared as cheerful and satisfied as possible. Boone hunted with the Shawnees. During shooting matches Boone was careful not to do too well so that the Shawnees would become envious. When the Shawnees were beating Boone they showed great joy. The Shawnee Chief even treated Boone with respect and friendship. Compared to being with his people Boone found the Shawnee food and lodging not so good. On June 1 Boone was taken to the Salt

Springs to make salt for ten days. Upon returning to the encampment Boone saw 450 of the best Shawnee warriors painted and armed for battle. They were preparing to attack Boonesborough! Daniel Boone plotted and escaped at the first opportunity. Following the secretive escape Daniel raced 160 miles through wilderness in 4 days, on only one meal. When Daniel arrived back in Boonesborough after living with the Shawnee for months, many other pioneers didn't recognize him and weren't sure if he was really Daniel Boone. The pioneer's skepticism dissipated when Daniel's cat noticed him and sat in his lap. When Daniel Boone arrived in Boonesborough the fort was in a bad state. Repairs began immediately. Flanks were repaired, gates, posters were strengthened, and double bastions were formed. Daniel sent a letter to Virginia sharing the situation, the Pioneer's resolve to hold on to Kentucky, and requested reinforcements.

Knowing Daniel Boone escaped, the Shawnee delayed their attack. Spies were watching the American settlement. Different Indian tribes gathered at the Grand Council of nations more frequently and deliberately to discuss the American settlements, Indian leaders were anxious about the future and plotted to extirpate Whites out of Kentucky.

… Oh it looks like we're already a little over our time for this class. Sorry about that, I need to watch the clock more carefully. Tomorrow we will resume our lesson with the Indians' battle against Boonesborough and other adventures of Daniel Boone! Here is your homework assignment for tonight.

Exercises:

1. Which war broke out when Daniel Boone was pioneering Kentucky?
    a) The Civil War
    b) The War of 1812
    c) American Revolutionary War
    d) World War 1.

2. Which denomination of church did the Boone family attend?
    a) Puritan
    b) Quaker
    c) Baptist
    d) Black Hebrew Israelite

3. Name five plants or animals that lived in Kentucky when Daniel Boone arrived.

4. What unique weapon did the Shawnee Indians use?
    a) Bow and arrow
    b) Musket
    c) Machete
    d) Tomahawk

5. Why did Daniel Boone decide to escape from the Shawnees?
    a) The Shawnees planned to attack Boonesborough
    b) Daniel was treated too harshly as a slave
    c) Daniel feared he would be murdered
    d) Shawnee food wasn't tasty enough for Daniel

6. Which State did Daniel Boone play a leading role in founding?
    a) Wyoming
    b) Maine
    c) Tennessee
    d) Kentucky

7. What building did the Pioneers build to help defend themselves against Indian attacks helping to give the Pioneers an advantage in combat?
    a) igloo
    b) castle
    c) tepee
    d) fort

Bonus Question: What kind of situation could be the modern equivalent of Daniel Boone being captured by Shawnee Indians? Name the situation and explain the similarities with Daniel Boone's predicament.

Source Material:

Filson, John. *The Discovery, Settlement And Present State Of Kentucky to Which Is Added The Adventures Of Daniel Boon 1784*. Kessinger's Legacy Reprints, 1784.

PART 1-DANIEL BOONE AND THE OPENING OF THE AMERICAN WEST, Witnessing History Education Foundation, 20 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr14TTfWB0Y&t=2650s.

PART 2-DANIEL BOONE AND THE OPENING OF THE AMERICAN WEST. Witnessing History Education Foundation, 18 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mqbspsrIsjk&t=47s.

"A History of Daniel Boone." Kentucky History Channel, 10 Dec. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylOz0A2S8L8.

"Who Was Daniel Boone? | American History Homeschool Curriculum." Compass Classroom, 5 Oct. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9vlSUFDgdI.

Original stared quote with typos left:

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