BEGINNING IN 1945, while Europe struggled with the desolation left by years of war, over 7,000 men and boys ages 16 to 72 traveled by ship on missions of mercy. They were seagoing cowboys—farm hands and folks from all walks of life: teachers, students, bankers, preachers, plumbers—and they were recruited to care for the thousands of horses and heifers sent for reparations.

The Seagoing Cowboy follows a young man and his friend as they board a ship bound for Poland. One cares for horses, the other for heifers on the weeks-long journey. What they see when they arrive is sobering: the war had left the country in ruins, and many people had nothing left. The horses and heifers would go a long way in helping them rebuild their lives. Archival photographs, a map, and an author’s note supplement the story.

Author Peggy Reiff Miller, the granddaughter of one such cowboy, brings this inspiring story to life for young readers in grades 1-3.
Discussion Questions

What makes a seagoing cowboy different from a regular cowboy? What jobs do cowboys on land and sea share?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.9

What were the reasons the seagoing cowboys wanted to take horses and heifers to Poland?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

How did the seagoing cowboys prepare for their trip by boat to Poland?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

How was the trip across the ocean difficult for the seagoing cowboys?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

What were some of the unexpected joys of bringing the animals on such a long journey by boat? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

After ten days at sea, the seagoing cowboys were thrilled to finally see land, but they still had a ways to go before they reached their final destination. Where did they still need to travel in order to get to Poland?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

Study the words and illustrations that describe how Poland looked to the seagoing cowboys when they arrived. Why was the gift of animals important to the people of Poland? Cite two ways that the horses and heifers helped the people.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7

How did the Polish children react when they saw the seagoing cowboys?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1

What did the seagoing cowboys see in Poland that made them feel sad? How had the war affected the land and the people of Poland? CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3

The seagoing cowboys had to endure the challenges of taking care of horses and heifers on a long sea voyage, while the people of Poland had to endure the loss and destruction of war. What do you think is the lesson or the message of this story?
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2
Activities

The seagoing cowboys left family and friends back in the United States when they helped transport horses and heifers across the Atlantic Ocean to Poland after the war. Read the captions under the photos of the seagoing cowboys at the end of the book to get an idea of what day-to-day life was like for the men and the animals aboard the ship. Use this information to write a friendly letter from the point of view of a seagoing cowboy to one of his friends or family members back home about what life is like on the ship. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3

After World War II, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the Heifer Project began shipping livestock to Europe and China. The Heifer Project originated as part of the Brethren Service Committee as part of the Church of the Brethren to send pregnant heifers to Europe. The UNRRA lasted until two years after the war but the Heifer Project continued sending seagoing cowboys and livestock all over the world. The Heifer Project later became Heifer International. Research how this organization continues to help people in need around the world at www.heifer.org. Write a short report focusing on what you learned about Heifer International. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2

Write a job advertisement for the position of a seagoing cowboy. What does the job require? What skills would a seagoing cowboy have to possess to be successful at this job? Include a job description and a list of qualities that an employer would be looking for in a seagoing cowboy. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.7

Trace the route the seagoing cowboys followed from the United States to Poland on a world map. Use the scale of the map to calculate how many miles they had to travel to deliver the livestock safely to the people of Poland. CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.2.MD.A.3

The discussion questions and activities in this guide were created by Leigh Courtney, PhD. She teaches in the Global Education program at a public elementary school in San Diego, California. She holds both master’s and doctoral degrees in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction.
Sequencing Story Events

Read the following list of events described in *The Seagoing Cowboy*. Number the events from 1 to 10 in the order in which they appeared in the story.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1**

___________ John discovered that his horse Queenie was on the ship to Poland.

___________ The children of Poland wanted gum and chocolates from the seagoing cowboys.

___________ The seagoing cowboys had to get shots before they boarded the ship to make sure that they didn’t get sick with tetanus and other diseases.

___________ The journey across the ocean lasted ten days, but the seagoing cowboys still had several days left before they reached Poland.

___________ A heifer named Hope gave birth on the ship to a calf named Joy.

___________ Many men were seeking adventure and wanted to help those in need after the war so they became seagoing cowboys.

___________ Even though the seagoing cowboys got shots, many still became sick with seasickness as they crossed the ocean.

___________ The seagoing cowboys were sad to see the damage to Poland caused by the war.

___________ The seagoing cowboys stayed in Poland for five days after they delivered the livestock.

___________ Heifers Hope and Joy were given to an orphanage so that the children would have fresh milk, butter, and cheese.

**ANSWERS:** 4, 8, 2, 6, 5, 1, 3, 7, 10, 9
Think of what a typical day would be like for a seagoing cowboy as he traveled across a stormy ocean to deliver horses and heifers to people in need. What chores would he have to do? What would sleeping and eating be like on the boat? Use this information to create a three-panel comic strip that shows what a seagoing cowboy might be doing in the morning, afternoon, and evening on a ship. Add speech bubbles or captions to help explain what is happening in each panel of the comic strip.

A Day in the Life of a Seagoing Cowboy

Morning       Afternoon       Evening

Name ___________________________________________
The seagoing cowboys were inspired to travel across
the ocean by boat to Europe not only for adventure,
but also because they knew there were people in
need after the war. People had lost family members,
homes, and a way to provide food for themselves.
The seagoing cowboys provided much needed
help to the people of Poland in this story. What are
some needs in your community? How could you and
your classmates, friends, and family help with these
needs? List some ideas in the chart below.

### Helping Here at Home

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