

The Ox-Bow Incident by Walter Van Tilburg Clark (Published in 1940)

Approved for use in English III

Summary of the Work:

A modern literary classic, *The Ox-Bow Incident* is a study of Old West mob justice. As two cowboys sit in the local saloon, allegations of cattle rustling and the murder of a local rancher precipitate the formation of a lynch mob to avenge the crime. Eventually, the vigilantes hang three innocent men and grapple with the effects of blind mob mentality and what happens in the absence of law and order.

Rationale:

While the novel does tie in nicely to American history and westward expansion, it is an excellent example of the effects of mob mentality. This concept appears in a number of works in the canon of American literature, and thus, the novel becomes a point of reference and invites comparison for a number of works. The novel intermeshes especially well with studies of the witch trials in Salem in 1692.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Kirkus Review (May 2001)
Kich, Martin, "The Ox-Bow Incident," *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 14 January 2004.

- * Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.
- * Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 890
- Readability Level: 7.1

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval: 1978

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

As a novel of the West, students in Montana can relate to the geographical, historical and philosophical references in the novel.

Published in 1940, Walter Van Tilburg Clark wrote the novel to parallel the actions taking place in Nazi Germany at the time.

Connection to the Curriculum:

The Ox-Bow Incident deals with some of the major themes in American literature, as referenced in the District curriculum, including alienation and isolation, survival of the fittest, rebellion and protest, and disillusionment.

It also links directly to juniors' concurrent study of American history.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

The film version of the novel is also available.

The novel is a nice lead-in to the study of the Salem witch trials.