



# TRUE STORY

Just like cowboys of the Old West, David can lasso a steer.

## Vocabulary

**steer:** a young male cow

**federation:** a group joined together by an agreement

**stampedes:** sudden, wild movements in one direction made by a large group of animals, usually because something has scared them

**admired:** liked and respected

**traditions:** ways of doing things that are handed down over many years

# Teen Cowboy

David follows in the footsteps of black cowboys of the Old West.

“Come on, boy!” says David McSwain. His horse, Soldier, breaks into a gallop, raising a cloud of dust.

Just a few years ago, David had no experience with horses. Then his mom heard about the Muddy Water Ranch in Cincinnati, Ohio. She signed David up for riding lessons.

David, 15, now knows how to ride and care for horses.

He has won many riding awards. He can even lasso a **steer!**

But that’s not all David has discovered at the ranch. He has also learned about the exciting history of African-American cowboys.

## History on Horseback

Clarence Clemens is the owner of the ranch, and he

is one of David’s teachers. He looks like a real cowboy. He even has a cowboy nickname. “Everybody always calls him ‘Solo,’” says David.

Solo is a member of the **Federation** of Black Cowboys. This organization aims to pass on cowboy skills to kids and teens. Members also teach people about black cowboys in history.

Movies and TV shows don’t include many African-American cowboys. But about one out of every four cowboys in the Old West was black.

“Back then, it was a job,” says David. “It was what a lot of people had to do.” He learned all about it from Solo.

## Life After Slavery

In the late 1800s, slavery in the United States had just ended. Now that they were free, African-Americans needed paid work.

“After the Civil War, black people couldn’t get many jobs,” David explains. “Some

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David learns roping skills from the ranch owner, Solo.



David gallops across a barn on his favorite horse, Soldier.



The ranch is like a second home to David.

joined the Army, and a lot of others became cowboys.”

Black cowboys rode all across the West. They brought cattle from ranches and herded them hundreds of miles to be sold in cities.

Being a cowboy was hard work. Cowboys spent many days on dusty trails. At night they slept under the stars.

Cowboys faced harsh storms and **stampedes**. Some were captured by Native Americans who didn't want cowboys on their land.

## Famous Cowboys

Some African-American cowboys, like Nat Love, were famous for their skills. Love wrote a popular book about his adventures.

Bill Pickett was a black cowboy who invented a new way to wrestle steers. He also performed in one of the most famous rodeo shows of his time. People came from all over to see him.

In the Old West, black soldiers were also well-known for their skills on horseback. In the late 1800s,

the U.S. Army often fought Native Americans. The Native Americans **admired** the African-American soldiers' bravery and strength. They nicknamed the black fighters “the Buffalo Soldiers.”

## Modern-Day Cowboy

Today, the Muddy Water Ranch has become like a second home to David. He volunteers there. He cleans up, exercises horses, and gets the animals ready for trail rides. “It's gotten me used to working a lot,” he says with a laugh.

Unlike the black cowboys of the Old West, David doesn't need to earn a living by riding horses. But when he uses skills that kept people alive 100 years ago, he helps to keep those **traditions** going for the future.



—Christy Damio