

Class Starters & Enders

Making the Most of Instructional Time Five Minute Lessons

Class Starters and Enders help utilize the last minutes of class when a lesson ends but there is not enough time to start another, or for an interest approach at the beginning of class. Mini-lessons correlate to GPS in the programs areas below.

Colt .45– How the West Was Won

Program Areas: Metals Technology, Agriculture, Homeland Security and Emergency Services

Instructions: Read the material and make notes of important points, answer questions, and be ready to discuss this topic.

“Abe Lincoln may have freed all men, but Sam Colt made them equal.” Colt firearms played a prominent role in American history and “Winning the West”. The inspiration came while Sam Colt was at sea; he noticed that no matter how the ship’s wheel turned, its spokes were always in contact with a clutch that could be set to hold it. From this he theorized a pistol that could be designed with a revolving cylinder holding several bullets that could be fired through a single barrel. In 1835, Samuel Colt patented his innovation, a five-shot revolver.

The model 1873 Colt .45 Single Action Army revolver is said to be the most famous gun in the world. No Hollywood Western movie was complete with out one and was sported by everyone from Theodore Roosevelt to Wyatt Earp to Billy the Kid. Infamously known as the Peacemaker or Frontier, the Colt .45 was produced by Colt Fire Arms Manufacturing Company of Hartford, Connecticut and was truly the most popular gun of the 1800’s. Selling for \$17 the Colt .45 was a must have necessity for the private citizen whether they were outlaws, cowboys, miners, farmers, gamblers, or sheriffs deputies. Even minority groups such as African Americans were owners of the Colt .45 and were seen as equals on the Western frontier. The Colt .45 was granted the nickname *The Peacemaker* after a quote made by Sam Colt in 1852. “The good people in this world are very far from being satisfied with each other and my arms are the best peacemaker.” Thus the Colt .45 became the unofficial symbol of the American West.



The Colt .45 held six bullets but unless you were going to use all six you rarely filled your barrel with more than five. This allowed the hammer to safely remain down on an empty chamber so if the gun was dropped or the hammer was bumped while in the holster no live round would fire. The hammer would have to be cocked back to turn the chamber for live fire.

In the 170 plus years that have followed the invention of the Colt .45, more than 30 million revolvers, pistols, and rifles bearing the Colt name have been produced. Colt firearms were the official firearms used by Texas Rangers and US Calvary, and were also used by both Confederate and Union Armies during the Civil War. The *Peacemaker* is still manufactured today with very minor alterations. However, the \$17 price tag has jumped to any where from \$400 to \$1,000 depending on the model. The price of an antique model in good condition can be worth \$10,000.

Review Questions

1. How was Sam Colt’s firearm different from any other firearm before it’s time?
2. Who owned Colt .45s?
3. Why was the Colt .45 nicknamed *The Peacemaker*?
4. Why would most Colt .45 users never fill the barrel with six bullets?
5. Colt firearms were used by what military groups in the 1800’s?
6. How many firearms has Colt produced since the invention of the Colt .45?

History Connection

Students could develop a timeline of major events in the American West during the 1800’s such as the Civil War, Louisiana Purchase, Indian Wars, Texas’ Statehood, and the Alamo etc.