



A Little Piece of Americana

HISTORY TOUR ACTIVITY WORKBOOK

OBJECTIVE

To give visiting students an introduction to the history of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and its place in California state history. This informational packet can be given to students before or after their tour to give them an awareness and appreciation of the historical significance of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, the City of Santa Cruz, and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The teacher or leader of the visiting class can use this guide to help lead an interactive discussion on the history of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, the history of California seaside amusement parks, the place of Santa Cruz in California history, and the importance of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Understanding that some students may not have been exposed to much information regarding the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk or its important place in California history, this outline provides the teacher with visual aids and discussion topics which are helpful in evoking ideas and responses. A Boardwalk history word match game and scavenger hunt are included at the back of this packet with accompanying teacher's keys.

Early Years on the Beach, 1850 – 1903

People have lived in this area along the coast for more than 10,000 years. From the 1790s to the 1840s the area was little more than a small coastal village. As early as the 1840s, however, foreigners, especially Americans, began transforming the area. When California became a state in 1850, many industries took off. Leather tanning, lime works, black powder production, and logging became the major industries in Santa Cruz County.

It is at this point in history that the Santa Cruz main beach became important. In 1849, the first wharf was built near the current site of the Dream Inn. More wharves followed, eventually reaching four at the same time! Then the railroad came to town. The first train connecting Watsonville to Santa Cruz opened in 1876. Four years later, the South Pacific Coast Railroad went all the way through the Santa Cruz Mountains to San Francisco.

Bathhouses began to spring up all along the Santa Cruz main beach thanks to popular theories that saltwater bathing was good for your health. People swam in itchy Victorian bathing suits, which covered the entire body but were very heavy when wet. A footpath made of boards connected the bathhouses to the Railroad Wharf and Pacific Avenue beyond.

Did You Know?

Bathhouses were primarily for renting and changing into swimming costumes. Most people in the late 1800s didn't own their own bathing suits. Bigger bathhouses would also have heated pools, saunas, restaurants, and ball rooms.



The first bathhouse, The Long Branch Baths, was built by Elizabeth and Mary Liddell in 1864. Meanwhile, the Leibbrandt brothers carted in changing rooms each summer to support the seasonal crowd. In 1868, they built the first heated indoor pool on the beach. By 1893, the Miller-Leibbrandt Plunge was the largest and most famous bathhouse in Santa Cruz, drawing thousands of tourists each year.

Discussion Question: Why did people at the turn of the century wear itchy, heavy bathing suits instead of the sleek, form-fitting bathing suits of today?

"Never a Dull Moment," 1904 – 1910

At the turn of the century, a man named Fred Swanton saw the potential of the Santa Cruz main beach and decided to act on it. Swanton was a local entrepreneur who sought to make Santa Cruz the "Atlantic City of the West Coast." He began by buying everything that was already on the beach, including the Miller-Leibbrandt Plunge, the entire beachfront to the San Lorenzo River, and everything in the field across the street. He then began promoting the area with special trains that ran across the state.

Fred Wilder Swanton

Born in 1862 in New York, Fred loved Coney Island when he was a boy. He built the Boardwalk to remind himself of his childhood home. Unfortunately, his project caused him to go bankrupt in 1912. He later became mayor of Santa Cruz three times before dying nearly penniless in 1940.



In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt visited Santa Cruz, prompting the city to widen and upgrade the footpath from the wharves. Soon after, Swanton began construction on the Neptune Casino, a massive two-story Moorish building that featured restaurants, shops, an arcade, and a grand ballroom. Across the street, Swanton built a tent city, which provided housing for the thousands of tourists who visited each year.

Unfortunately, in June 1906 the entire complex, including parts of the tent city and the original Miller-Leibbrandt Plunge, burned to the ground. Swanton was shaken but not defeated. He immediately made preparations for a new casino complex. Swanton hired William Henry Weeks, a famous California architect, to build the casino, and it still stands today.



Discussion Question: Why was it so important for Fred Swanton to rebuild quickly after the fire in 1906? Remember that the fire happened in June.

Tourism in Santa Cruz, 1911 – Present

The new Casino opened less than a year after the fire and the Boardwalk was granted a second life. To encourage tourists to come and stay, Swanton built the Casa del Rey Hotel across the street from the Casino. The hotel was demolished in 1989 after the Loma Prieta Earthquake, but the two large palm trees near the corner of the parking lot mark the hotel's south entrance.



Casa del Rey Apartments

La Bahia Apartments, located down Beach Street toward the wharf, were built in 1926 as a part of the Casa del Rey Hotel, serving as its deluxe apartments.

The Casino's ballroom has hosted hundreds of famous bands through the years. From the 1920s through the 1950s, the era of Big Bands brought thousands to the ballroom on weekend nights. In 1934, the ballroom was renamed the Coconut Grove. While concerts at the Grove are a thing of the past, concerts on the Boardwalk continue a tradition dating back to 1904.

In 1924, now-Mayor Swanton encouraged Santa Cruz to host a Miss California Pageant at the Boardwalk. For the next forty years, the Boardwalk would cater to the young and beautiful California models on its pristine expanse of coastline. Beginning in the 1910s, many films have also been recorded at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, including Clint Eastwood's *Sudden Impact* and cult-classic *The Lost Boys*. Today, Movies-on-the-Beach honors this tradition.



Discussion Question: What features make the Santa Cruz beach a great vacation spot? What other places also have those characteristics?

Plunging into the Boardwalk, 1907 – 1963



Alongside the new Casino, William Weeks built the Natatorium, popularly known as the Plunge. It was a heated salt-water pool built beside the Casino. When it first opened in 1907, it included a three-story water slide, a wading pool for women, and a smaller single-story slide. For fifty-five years, the Plunge drew tourists from all over the area.

Tourists primarily came to Santa Cruz in the early years via railroad. In the 1927, the Southern Pacific began running the Sun Tan Special between San Francisco and Santa Cruz. Thousands of tourists streamed into Santa Cruz aboard these trains, and the special route continued until 1959. Today, Roaring Camp runs daily trips in the summer to the Boardwalk from the redwood-speckled San Lorenzo Valley.



Did You Know?

The Plunge was filled with 408,000 gallons of ocean water pumped in via a pipe along the the Pleasure Pier. The Pier jutted out into the ocean from where the Pirate Ship is today. The water was heated to 83°F so guests could comfortably enjoy the salty water.

One spectacle that drew crowds was the Plunge Water Carnival. Child stars such as Shirley Wightman and Harry Murray performed alongside underwater swimming world record-holders Ruth Kahl and Dido Scettrini. Most of the older performers doubled as lifeguards and swim instructors. Don "Bosco" Patterson was most famous for performing his "Slide-for-Life" zip-line stunt off the roof of the Casino to the end of the Pleasure Pier. On special occasions, he would even perform the stunt while ON FIRE!

In 1963, the Plunge was replaced with a temporary miniature golf course. In 1991, this was converted into Neptune's Kingdom.

Discussion Question: Why was train travel so important to the early success of the tourist industry in Santa Cruz?

Rides at the Santa Cruz Beach

There were rides at the beach even before Swanton become involved with the Boardwalk. A steam-driven merry-go-round sat across the tracks in the 1880s. In 1907, Fred Swanton brought the Bay Shore Limited miniature railroad, which ran from the Pleasure Pier to the San Lorenzo River. The next year, he brought in the thrilling L.A. Thompson Scenic Railway roller coaster. A new carousel was built in 1911 by Charles I.D. Loeff and it can still be ridden over 100 years later. While riding the carousel, listen to the 1894 Ruth & Sohn pipe organ that plays songs in rotation with other historic but newer organs.

Did You Know?

The Carousel is also famous for its brass rings that can be thrown into a clown's mouth. In 1958, the brass rings were removed and ridership dropped 75%! The rings made a quick comeback.



Of all the rides at the Boardwalk, the Giant Dipper roller coaster is the most famous. Arthur Loeff, the son of Charles, built and finished the ride in a record five months in 1924. It required 327,000 feet of lumber, 743,000 nails, and 63,000 pounds of steel track. Today, it is the fifth oldest operating roller coaster in the United States and is praised as one of the best roller coaster experiences. Over 68 million riders cannot disagree with that! The Loeff Carousel and the Giant Dipper were declared National Historic Landmarks in 1987.

The Boardwalk currently has 40 rides and attractions. The Cave Train, built in the 1961, remains a favorite of many guests, while 1953's Bulgy the Whale still entertains. Meanwhile, the Haunted Castle continues a long tradition of dark, spooky rides which began in 1932 with Dante's Inferno. Newer additions, Typhoon and Shockwave, are part of the Main Entrance Plaza which opened in 2017.



Discussion Question: Why does the Boardwalk continue to mix old and new rides together? What are the benefits of keeping old rides?

Preservation and the Beach



The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk strives to protect the beach and the ocean environment. The **Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary** expands north past San Francisco and south to San Luis Obispo with the goal of protecting the Central California coast and the animals and plants that live within the Pacific Ocean.

On any given day at the Santa Cruz main beach sea lions can be heard barking under the wharf and sea gulls and pelicans sit atop roofs, rides, and just about anywhere. Throughout the year gray and humpback whales migrate just beyond the beach, while dolphins pass by on warm spring mornings. The bay is a thriving ecosystem.

From 1995 to 2011, the Boardwalk won the "Waste Reduction Award" from the California Integrated Waste Management Board, and it has been deemed a "Clean Ocean Business" by the City of Santa Cruz since 2004. The Marine Sanctuary itself has awarded us the "Sanctuary Reflections Award."



Winning these awards was not easy and required commitment. Over 180 tons of material are recycled annually by the Boardwalk each year and over 1 million gallons of recycled water are used to water the plants and landscaping. Food locations no longer use Styrofoam and most company vehicles are electric. The Boardwalk is committed to a green future.

Discussion Question: Why is it a good idea for the Boardwalk to keep the beaches and ocean clean?

The Future of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

After over 115 years in operation and over 150 years since the first bathhouse opened, the future of the Boardwalk is bright. In 1986, the entire park became California State Historic Landmark #983, with the Giant Dipper and Looff



Carousel becoming National Historic Landmarks the next year. Starting in 2007 the Boardwalk won the Golden Ticket Award for the “Best Seaside Amusement Park” in the world from *Amusement Today* 11 times and was awarded Golden Ticket Legend status when the category was retired in 2019. In 2012 and 2017,

it was nominated for the “Applause Award,” the highest industry award, by the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA).

But the Boardwalk is not just about awards. It is about memories. The Historium upstairs in Neptune’s Kingdom showcases much of the history of the Boardwalk since 1866 and is recognized as one of 28 museums within Santa Cruz County. Plaques scattered along the Boardwalk mark points of historical or environmental interest.



Annual events such as the Clam Chowder Cook-Off bring the Santa Cruz community together while the Boardwalk also supports local programs such as Big Brothers-Big Sisters and the Boys & Girls Club. The Santa Cruz Band Review and the USA Regional Cheer & Dance Competition each fall showcase young local talent, while yearly participation in the Second Harvest Food Drive helps support those in need.

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is an ever-changing center of culture and life for Santa Cruz. From the first bathhouses to the concerts of local celebrities such as James Durbin, the Boardwalk continues to create memories for locals and visitors alike. As you head out and enjoy the Boardwalk today, remember all that came before it, then make some memories of your own.

Discussion Questions: Why has the Boardwalk survived for over 115 years when so many other seaside amusement parks in California have closed?

History Scavenger Hunt

As you wander around the Boardwalk, see if you can find these historic and interesting places among and near the exciting rides and games.

The Municipal Wharf

La Bahia's Bell Tower

Cocoanut Grove Entrance A

The Casa del Rey Palm Trees

Cottage City Houses

The Casino's Rotunda

Neptune's Kingdom

Water Carnival Trapeze Bar

The Historium

Laffin' Sal

The Colonnade

Marini's Taffy-Wrapping Machine

Miller's Sun Shops

The Water Race Game

The Original Boards Plaque

The California Historic Site Marker

The Looff Carousel

A Lifeguard Tower

Octopus' Garden

Black & White Ice Cream Shop

The Giant Dipper

Crystal Palace Dime Toss

Bulgy the Whale

The Main Entrance Plaza

The Cave Train

The San Lorenzo River

The Railroad Trestle

The Monterey Peninsula

Word Match

Match a word or phrase on the left with a word or phrase on the right by drawing a line between the two.

Theodore Roosevelt	a ballroom in the Grand Casino
Fred Swanton	place where people changed clothes little
Karl Rice	houses that once filled the parking lot built
John Leibbrandt	the 1911 Carousel
Elizabeth Liddell	a train that ran in the summer on Sundays
Victorian bathing suit	built the Giant Dipper Roller Coaster visited
Bathhouse	in 1903
Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf	current president of the Boardwalk
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary	demolished after the 1989 earthquake the
Charles I.D. Looff	theme of the Cave Train
Arthur Looff	built the first bathhouse in Santa Cruz held
Casa del Rey	at the Boardwalk until the 1960s built the
Cocoanut Grove	first plunge
Sun Tan Special	protects the local ocean environment
Water Carnival	a Saturday night event in The Plunge
Miss California	originally built to service deep-water ships
The Stone Age	built the Neptune Casino
La Bahia	flows into the Monterey bay
Cottage City	Originally called Casa del Rey Apartments
San Lorenzo River	made of wool and itchy

Teacher Resources

Scavenger Hunt Key

*All of the items are in rough geographic order,
from west to east. Here are explanations for the items.*

The Municipal Wharf – Visible throughout the Boardwalk from the beach. Built in 1914 to service deep-water ships.

La Bahia's Bell Tower – Visible from outside the Casino down Beach Street. Stands over La Bahia Apartments, which was once a part of the Casa del Rey Hotel.

Cocoanut Grove Entrance A – Just outside the Casino Redemption Center. Marks the current entrance to the Cocoanut Grove Ballroom, opened in 1907.

The Casa del Rey Palm Trees – Across the street from the Casino's entrance. Marks the original site of the Casa del Rey Hotel and its southern entrance.

Cottage City Houses – At the back-right corner of the main parking lot. These square cottages once filled the entire parking lot and were rented by tourists.

The Casino's Rotunda – Inside the Casino Arcade at Fisherman's Galley Restaurant.

Neptune's Kingdom – Large building beside the Casino with a high-arched ceiling. Once housed the Plunge Natatorium where the Water Carnivals were held.

Water Carnival Trapeze Bar – Visible on the rafters of Neptune's Kingdom near the large mural. Water Carnival performers' trapezes used to hang from these.

The Colonnade – Lines the beach side of the Casino and Neptune's Kingdom.

The Historium – Upstairs in Neptune's Kingdom on the Game Deck. This is the Boardwalk's official museum.

Laffin' Sal – At the beach entrance to Neptune's Kingdom. Laffin' Sal was originally from Playland at the Beach in San Francisco. When Playland closed in 1972, Laffin' Sal was put in storage until the Boardwalk bought her in 2005.

The Main Entrance Plaza – Constructed in 2017 to create a memorable welcome experience for guests.

Marini's Taffy-Wrapping Machine – Visible inside Marini's under the Colonnade. The machine was purchased in 1922 and still works today.

Miller's Sun Shops – Found at the end of the Colonnade, this is the Miller family's main and oldest store.

The Water Race Game – Race against other players to fill the balloon with water to make it pop first.

The Original Boards Plaque – Near the round ticket booth beside the Carousel. The three redwood boards on this plaque are some of the last original boards removed from the Boardwalk. The entire Boardwalk once was just simple boards.

The CA Historic Site Marker – Across from the original boards near the Carousel.

The Looff Carousel – Housed in the large round building topped by seahorses. While the Carousel was built in 1911, the current building was constructed in 1967.

A Lifeguard Tower – Dotting the beach, these city lifeguard towers are the modern equivalent of stations that were once operated by Boardwalk lifeguards who doubled as swim instructors and Water Carnival performers at The Plunge.

Octopus' Garden – Located next to the Haunted Castle, Octopus' Garden is one of the oldest retail store buildings on the Boardwalk, dating back to the 1960s.

Black & White Ice Cream Shop – Squeezed between Balloon Bust and Dipper Diner, this little ice cream shop is a recreation of the oldest restaurant on the Boardwalk and is run by Whiting's Foods.

The Giant Dipper – Under the Giant Dipper arch and continuing east, the Giant Dipper is the fifth oldest roller coaster in the United States, built in 1924.

Crystal Palace Dime Toss – Located across the from Sea Swings, people have been tossing dimes into glasses at Dime Toss since the 1940s.

Bulgy the Whale – Near Rock-O-Plane. These little orca whales still swim in circles as they have for decades as one of the Boardwalk's oldest kiddie rides.

The Cave Train – Buried in the lower east end of the Boardwalk, the Cave Train to the Lost World arrived in 1961 and quickly became a favorite among guests.

The San Lorenzo River – Visible from the Ferris Wheel and along the eastern edge of the park, the San Lorenzo River constantly battles with the beach due to ever-shifting sands and heavy rainy seasons.

The Railroad Trestle – Towering over the river on the east end of the Boardwalk, this relic of the 1930s has supported thousands of tourists arriving at the beach.

The Monterey Peninsula – On clear days, visible across the bay. The search for Monterey Bay is what brought the Spanish to Santa Cruz in the 1700s.

Word Match Key

The words at left correspond to the words at right.

Theodore Roosevelt	visited in 1903
Fred Swanton	built the Neptune Casino
Karl Rice	current president of the Boardwalk
John Leibbrandt	built the original plunge
Elizabeth Liddell	built the first bathhouse in Santa Cruz
Victorian bathing suit	made of wool and itchy
bathhouse	place where people changed clothes
Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf	originally built for deep-water ships
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary	protects the local ocean environment
Charles I.D. Looff	built the 1911 Carousel
Arthur Looff	built the Giant Dipper Roller Coaster
Casa del Rey	demolished after the 1989 earthquake
Cocoanut Grove	a ballroom in the Grand Casino
Suntan Special	a train that ran in the summer on Sundays
Water Carnival	a nightly event in the Plunge
Miss California	held at the Boardwalk until the 1960s
The Stone Age	the theme of the Cave Train
La Bahia	originally called Casa del Rey Apartments
Cottage City	little houses that once filled the parking lot
San Lorenzo River	flows into the Monterey Bay

Historic Walking Tour Sign Locations

