I tell ya...everybody wants to be a cowboy.

But cowboy life ain't just tough talkin'. It's tough LIVING...And then, some tough talking.

1854: I was born a slave in Tennessee.

It was illegal for slaves, but my dad, Sampson, taught me to read. He died pretty soon after the Civil War ended slavery.

I gave half to my mom. Then I moved out to Kansas, where I learned to ride, rope, and shoot.

I was pretty durn good at it, too.

Folks nowadays like to act like there were no Black cowboys.

A lotta folks dispute the facts of my life, saying it's all too incredible to be true.


At 13, I won a horse in a raffle...and sold it back to its owner for $100.

But we were everywhere after the Civil War. In 1879, I moved to Deadwood, a South Dakota outlaw town--

--where I won the rope, throw, tie, bridle, saddle, and bronco-riding contests. They called me "Deadwood Dick". That's how I was known from then on.
At least, until some others tried to lay claim to that nickname.

Like I said, folks dispute my accomplishments. My life was full of wild adventures: chasing stampeding cattle, roping wild mustangs—

--even sharing drinks with Billy the Kid.

In Arizona in 1877, I was attacked by Native Americans from the Pima Tribe.

Turns out I had gotten into their territory.

They caught me, but spared me because they respected my fighting abilities.

Of course I escaped.

Plus, a lot of them had African-American blood in their families.

Stole a pony, rode it bareback, about 100 miles to the west.

In 1889, I got married. Cowboy work was dying. So I moved to Denver.

Got work as a railroad pullman sleeping car porter.

I loved Denver, but I always liked being on the move.

So, by the time I died in 1921, I was living in Los Angeles.

One thing about cowboy life: Talent and hard work were always appreciated, no matter what your color.

The Wild West allowed me to be not just a man, but also a hero.
Nat Love
1854 – 1921
Story: R. Alan Brooks
Art: Cody Kuehl

Discussion Questions:

3-5th Grade

• When you think of a cowboy, what do you see in your mind? What do they wear? What do they do with their day?
• What do you want to be when you grow up? What would you do if someone told you that you are not allowed to do that?
• Why did the members of the Pima Tribe let Nat go when they caught him? What does it mean to have respect for another person?
• How does the comic make Nat’s experiences come to life? Which pictures show him engaging in an exciting activity?

MS

• Nat Love was born a slave and, as such, was not allowed to learn to read. Why do you suppose that law existed?
• In the second panel of the first page, Nat says “a lot of folks dispute the facts of my life, saying it’s all too incredible to be true.” Are there any parts of this story that you find hard to believe?
• Nat Love took the name “Deadwood Dick.” What would your cowboy name be if you could choose it for yourself?
• In both the fifth panel of the first page and the second panel of the second page, Nat is shown firing his gun from horseback. How does including two images that are so similar to one another enhance your understanding of the character?

HS

• The artwork of this comic contains a lot of thick lines and an abundance of deep shading. How does this style inform the tone of the story being told here?
• Why do you suppose that people today do not believe, as Nat points out in the comic, that there were any African American cowboys?
• Not only was Nat literate, he wrote a book about his life. Why would there be laws against slaves learning to read? Consider the nature of racism in America today as well as what it was like in the mid to late 1800’s.
• At the end of the comic, Nat says that the Wild West gave him the chance to be a hero. What, in your opinion makes a hero and how is Nat Love heroic?

Lesson Ideas

ART:

• Choose a historical figure who defied societal norms and became an icon of their time. Create a minicomic celebrating this accomplishment.
• Consider the use of deep browns and blacks and the almost painting like quality of the artwork. Have students find paintings that are similar to this style and compare the mood of those works to this comic.

Language Arts

• Read excerpts from Nat Love’s book (linked in the “Resources” section of this teacher guide) and analyze the style of the narrative. Have them establish a theme and use the text as evidence to explain this theme in a short essay.
• Choose one of Nat’s experiences from his book and write a fictionalized narrative based on this information with Nat as the central character.
• View the video “The Black Cowboy” (linked in the Resources section). Have students write short responses based on the following prompt: “What fact about African American cowboys most surprised you?”

Social Studies

• Have students research the role of African Americans in the history of the military in this country. Have them choose a specific regimen or unit and report out to the class via a digital presentation their selection and offer their own thoughts about the military and historical impact of their contribution.
• The comic recounts Nat’s run in with the Pima Tribe but was spared due to their respect for him. Have students research Native American tribes in North American in the late 1800s and explore how their culture informs choices like this one.

Resources:

*The Life and Adventures of Nat Love ; Better Known in the Cattle Country as Deadwood Dick*
http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/natlove/menu.html

Nat Love at Legends of America
https://www.legendsofamerica.com/we-natlove/
The Black Cowboy: A Documentary on YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJ014Yaehic
ART NOTES
Here, we’re mostly just trying to show Nat Love as the bad-ass cowboy he was. I’ll provide visual references, but only to give an idea of what I’m thinking in terms of tone or emotion. So some of the refs won’t look like the characters, they’ll just show the emotion I want. How you choose to convey those emotions is ultimately up to you. Thanks!
Panel One
Wide panel, and taller than panel two so it’s the largest panel on the page. We’re on a small farm on a bright August day. In the foreground, a FATHER is standing on the porch, gesturing to his 14-year-old SON, who’s running up a path to the house. The son is smiling big, excited for the adventure to come. The father, a farmer, is holding a newspaper at his side, visible enough to read a headline. In the background, all around the house, we see fields of corn growing tall all the way to the horizon. The father should have a clean shaven face.

Note: Leave room for the title and credits.

CAPTION 1:

FATHER
Get your stuff, son. We’re going to Colorado. We’re not farmers anymore. We’re gold miners.

NEwsPaper NAME
Journal of Commerce

NEwSPAPER HEADLINE
The New Eldorado!

Panel Two
Wide panel, but not as tall as panel one. The father and son in a horse-drawn, covered wagon. They’ve arrived in Colorado at a spot nestled at the base of the Rocky Mountains. Spread out in front of them are 100s of tents, with even more men walking about, scattered around campfires heading up into the hills. The son is so excited to be here, so he’s standing, pointing ahead of them, smiling from ear to ear at his father. The father is excited, too, but he knows there’s work to be done. The father should have some stubble on his face.

SON
Look at ‘em all, pa. There must be gold everywhere!

FATHER
Oh, there’ll be plenty to go around, all right. But we best hurry and stake our claim.
Panel Three
Small panel. The father is kneeling next to a stream, a pan in his hand. He’s squinting, looking hard at the tiny rocks and silt in the pan, looking for anything gold. He’s tilting the pan, swirling the water around. The boy is next to him, crouching down, excited. The stream flows off behind them into the mountains. The vegetation around them is green and lush.

SON
What we’d get, pa? Did we get any?

FATHER
No. Nothing. We should try further up stream.

Panel Four
Small panel. Similar to panel three. It’s a month later, and the father’s beard is fuller. He’s looking down at a few tiny pieces of gold in his hand. The boy is cold, rubbing his arms with his hands. The excitement is gone from his face. He’s thinner from not eating as well as he once did. The leaves on the aspen trees are golden now.

SON
Dad, I’m hungry.

FATHER
Me, too, son. But we’ll need more than this if we’re gonna make it much longer.

Panel Five
Small panel. The father and son are marching along the stream, leading a horse loaded down with supplies. The boy’s gaunt face is showing signs of malnourishment from not eating enough. They’re clearly heading downward, where a town waits off panel. There’s snow on the ground now. Off behind them, we can just make out the entrance to a mine, with a mine cart abandoned out front.

FATHER
We need to head to town. Maybe what we have will get us through winter.

(linked)
Dang it! We should’ve gotten on with Gregory and his team when we had the chance.
Panel One
Small panel. In town now. It’s a bright June day. Close in on the boy, who is sitting out front of small bank (the boy should be in the corner of the panel, so the focus is on what’s happening behind him inside). Behind him is a huge window (if there’s room, the window should have text that reads MONEY FOR GOLD), through which we can see his dad arguing with a man inside. The father is holding open a small pouch. Next to the man is a scale.

FATHER
What? This has to be worth more than that.

BANK MAN
I’m sorry, but it’s mostly dust, and it’s sticking to the pouch. There’s nothing I can do.

Panel Two
Small panel. The boy and his father outside the bank not long after the previous panel. The father is mad, practically yelling at the two men who’ve approached them. Two men look like they just got there and are as excited as our two main characters were to start our story.

MAN 1
Hey mister, how much money did you get? Is there really gold everywhere like Greeley says?

FATHER

Panel Three
Dad and son packing up their wagon. The father and son are both dejected. In the background, the two men he just yelled at are walking off in front of a supply shop.

SON
Pa? I heard there’s no food or supplies anywhere. What is everyone going to do?

FATHER
Go back. They’re all going back home. And so are we.
Panel Four
Wide panel. The two are heading back over the open plains. This should mirror panel 2 of our story, but instead of our pair being excited, there’s an air of disappointment. They’re both dejected, shoulders slumped. Off in the distance, we see several other wagons heading off back home, too. There should be enough people heading off into the distance to know that almost everyone is going back home.

SON
Don’t worry, pa. There’s no food around here anyway. Too many mouths to feed.

FATHER
There are a lot of mouths, aren’t there. Even with all of these people leaving.

Panel Five
Wide panel. Similar to the first panel in our story. But here, the father and son are looking out over the open plains. The father is gesturing out at the plains, imaging his crops. He’s excited all over again. Of in the distance, surrounding them, we see the outlines of his crops, and a small farm house (he’s imagining a farm nearly identical to what we saw in the opening panel); it’s all in his mind right now, so we can see the wagons through the farm and the crops.

FATHER
Wait. What were we thinking? It’s been right here all along. This is why we came out here. We’re not miners. We’re farmers. Farmers! And always will be.
PAGE ONE – SIX PANELS

PANEL ONE
Nat Love, from shoulders up, cowboy hat tipped low, chewing on straw, looking super cool.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): I tell ya--
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): --everybody wants to be a cowboy.
3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): But cowboy life ain’t just tough talkin’. It’s tough living.
4. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): (And then, some tough talking).

PANEL TWO
Shot of Nat Love’s hands; at his desk, writing his book.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): A lotta folks dispute the facts of my life, saying it’s all too incredible to be true.
PANEL THREE
Sampson Love teaching a young Nat to read.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): 1854: I was born a slave in Tennessee.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): It was illegal for slaves, but my dad, Sampson, taught me to read.
3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): He died pretty soon after the Civil War ended slavery.

PANEL FOUR
Teen Nat Love overjoyed from winning a raffle.

Probably dressed like this:
1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): At 15, I won a horse in a raffle--
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): --and sold it back to its owner for $100.

PANEL FIVE - Big, dynamic panel
Nat Love riding a horse and shooting.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): I gave half to my mom.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): Then I moved out to Kansas, where I learned to ride, rope, and shoot.
3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): I was pretty durn good it, too.
4. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): Folks nowadays like to act like there were no Black cowboys.

PANEL SIX
Nat Love, looking badass, walking into an old West bar full of shady looking types, some Black, some White.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): But we were everywhere after the Civil War.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): In 1876, I moved to Deadwood, a South Dakota outlaw town--
3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): --where I won the rope, throw, tie, bridle, saddle, and bronco-riding contests.
4. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): They called me “Deadwood Dick”.
5. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): That’s how I was known from then on.
PAGE TWO– FIVE PANELS

PANEL ONE
Nat Love and Billy The Kid laughing and sharing drinks at a bar. Maybe like this, but looking at each other instead:

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): At least, until some others tried to lay claim to that nickname.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): (Like I said, folks dispute my accomplishments).
3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): My life was full of wild adventures: chasing stampeding cattle, roping wild mustangs--
4. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): --even sharing drinks with Billy the Kid.

PANEL TWO
Nat Love fighting a group of Pima Indians.
1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): In Arizona in 1877, I was attacked by Pima Indians.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): They caught me, but spared me because they respected my fighting abilities.
3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): Plus, a lot of them had African-American blood in their families.

**PANEL THREE**
Nat Love, hands tied behind his back, looking exhausted, riding a pony without a saddle.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): Of course, I escaped.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): Stole a pony; rode it bareback, about 100 miles, to West Texas.
**PANEL FOUR**
Nat Love, on a train as a pullman porter, with a wedding band on his hand.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): In 1889, I got married.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): Cowboy work was dying.
3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): So I moved to Denver.
4. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): Got work as a railroad Pullman sleeping car porter.
5. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): I loved Denver, but I always liked being on the move.

**PANEL FIVE**
Bad-ass profile of Nat Love, leaned up against a wall, with his hat tilted down.

1. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): So, by the time I died in 1921, I was living in Los Angeles.
2. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): One thing about cowboy life: talent and hard work were always appreciated, no matter what your color.

3. NAT LOVE (CAPTION): The Wild West allowed me to be not just a man, but also a hero.

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