

“Explore Tucson” by Canyon View Elementary Gifted 5th Grade

How Did Westward Expansion Shape Tucson?

Explore Tucson: Students as Historians & Civic Thinkers

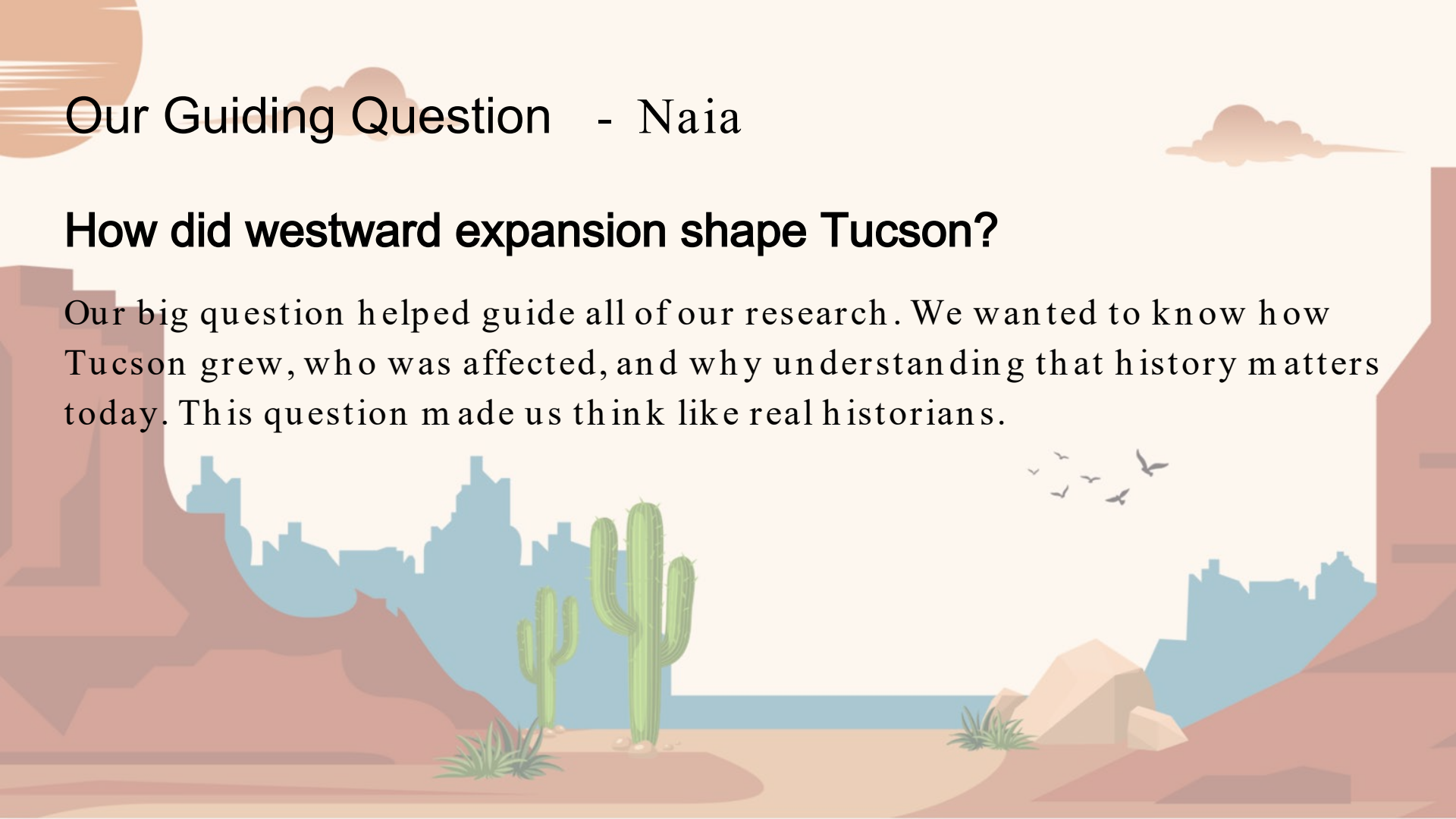
Good morning everyone! We are so excited to share a project that has let students become historians and civic thinkers. Over the past couple months, students have researched Tucson's history, met with site experts, and created a multimedia tour for the public. We want to show you how students can make history come alive.



Our Guiding Question - Naia

How did westward expansion shape Tucson?

Our big question helped guide all of our research. We wanted to know how Tucson grew, who was affected, and why understanding that history matters today. This question made us think like real historians.



What We Wanted To Do - Ivy

- Understand how westward expansion made an impact in the place that we live
- Study real landmarks and organizations
- Analyze historical evidence from multiple sources
- Share what we learned with the community
- Invite the community to share their thoughts with us

We wanted to go beyond just reading about history. We became researchers, analyzed primary and secondary sources, and thought about who was impacted by past decisions. Then, we created ways for the community to interact with and learn from what we discovered.

Where We Explored - Veda

- Mission Garden - Indigenous history, land, water, agriculture
- El Presidio San Agustín - Borders, laws, Tucson becoming part of the U.S.
- Hotel Congress - Railroads, transportation, city growth
- Arizona Mining Association - Economy, natural resources, migration
- Arizona History Museum - Daily life, families, travel
- Tucson Water - Systems, change, interaction

We each picked a site and studied it deeply. We learned how these places connected to westward expansion and how they shaped the city we live in today. Some of us even covered two sites to tell a bigger story.

Becoming Historians - CeCe

- Collected primary sources: photographs, maps, newspaper clippings
- Examined secondary sources: museum exhibits, articles, presentations
- Analyzed perspectives: who benefitted, who was affected
- Traced connections: Then vs. now

We worked like real historians. We looked at different types of sources, thought about different perspectives, and noticed how decisions from the past still affect Tucson today. It was really exciting to see how U.S. history is connected to our own city.

Systems Thinking - Abby

- Land and water use: irrigation, farming, urban growth
- Transportation: railroads, roads, tourism
- Economy: mining, hotels
- Community: Families, culture, public spaces

We learned that every decision in history connects to multiple systems in Tucson. For example, building a railroad affected jobs, neighborhoods, and trade. Understanding these connections helped us think critically about how cities grow.

What We Learned - Naia

- We realized that some people's stories are remembered while others may be forgotten
- History isn't just the past, it's still reflected in our city today
- We can ask questions that help the community make fair decisions.

We wanted to share how this project changed the way we think about Tucson. History became real when we saw connections between the past and our lives today.



How the Community Can Explore - Ivy

- We have placed a QR code at each site for a public city tour
- Each QR code links to a multimedia presentation with our historical analysis
- There are also civic reflection questions for the community to engage with and share their thoughts
- This is an interactive experience for families to do together

We created a tour that anyone can take, in person or through our virtual option online. Each stop has historical evidence, multiple perspectives, and questions to think about. We want everyone to feel like they are learning history along with us.

Asking the Community - Veda

- How should Tucson balance growth and preserving history?
- Whose voices are missing from our city's story?
- How can we make fair decisions for Tucson's future?

We wrote and included civic questions because history isn't just about the past, its about decisions today. We want the community to reflect and respond, so they can help shape Tucson responsibly.



Our Project's Impact - CeCe

- Students become historians and teachers
- Community learns about Tucson through the eyes of 5th graders
- Connects local history to national and global themes
- Encourages ethical reasoning and civic engagement

This project shows that students can make a real difference. We're not just learning history, we are sharing it, asking questions, and helping the community think about its future.

Explore Tucson! - Abby

- We hope you will help us spread the word so people will take our tour and share their experience through civic reflection

Thank you so much for letting us share our project with you today. We hope people enjoy exploring Tucson's history and reflecting on how the city has grown. Most importantly, we hope you see how capable and excited students can be when given the chance to think like historians.

