

***Wagon Wheels*** by Barbara Brenner (Harper Trophy, 1978) ISBN 0-06-44052-4

**Literature Annotation:**

Shortly after the Civil War an African American family travels to Kansas to take advantage of the free land offered through the Homestead Act. It is based on a true story of three young sons and the dangers they face on the frontier when they are left alone while their father goes to look for better land.

**Grade Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade

**Duration:** 2 class periods

**Maryland State Curriculum**

***Economics Standard:*** Students will develop economic reasoning to understand the historical development and current status of economic principles, institutions, and processes needed to be effective citizens, consumers, and workers participating in local communities, the nation, and the world.

- 4.A.1.c Identify the opportunity cost of a choice or decision
- 4.A.2.a Explain how producers make choices because of limited natural, human, and capital resources
- 4.A.2.c Describe steps in the production process to produce a product

***Geography Standard:*** Students will use geographic concepts and processes to examine the role of culture, technology, and the environment in the location and distribution of human activities and spatial connections throughout time.

- 3.A.1 Use geographic tools to locate and construct meaning about places on Earth
- 3.D.1.a Describe how people in a community modify their environment to meet changing needs for transportation, shelter, and making a living

***Reading Standard:*** Students will use a variety of strategies to understand what they read (construct meaning).

- 1.D.1 Develop and apply vocabulary through exposure to a variety of texts
- 1.E.4 Use strategies to demonstrate understanding of the text (after reading)
- 3.A.1.a Listen to critically, read, and discuss a variety of literary texts representing diverse cultures, perspectives, and ethnicities and time periods

**Objectives:** Students will be able to...

- identify the reasons African Americans moved west after the Civil War.
- describe human, capital, and natural resources.
- explain how pioneers used human, capital, and natural resources to modify the environment to meet their needs.

## **Vocabulary**

**capital resources:** the goods that are manufactured and constructed by people and used to produce other goods and services

**human resources:** the health, strength, talents, education and skills that humans can use to produce goods and services

**natural resources:** gifts of nature that can be used to produce goods and services

**Additional Vocabulary:** dugout, Exodusters, Homestead Act, prairie

## **Teacher Materials**

Teacher Resource Sheet #1: *All Colored People That Want to Go to Kansas*

## **Student Materials**

Student Resource Sheet #1: *Wagon Wheels: An Artful Reflection*

Student Resource Sheet #2: *Productive Resources*

Student Resource Sheet #3a: *Orange Juice*

Student Resource Sheet #3b: *Pumpkin Pie*

Student Resource Sheet #3c: *Shirt*

Student Resource Sheet #3d: *Rocking Chair*

Student Resource Sheet #4: *Production Chart*

## **Resources:**

Nicodemus National Historic Site

<http://www.nps.gov/nico/index.htm>

Life in a Sod House

[http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstoryinhistory/tryathome/activities\\_sodhouse.htm](http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstoryinhistory/tryathome/activities_sodhouse.htm)

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Building a Sodhouse- Interactive activity from the Smithsonian

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstoryinhistory/tryonline/buildsodhouse.html>

## **Teacher Background**

The Homestead Act of 1862 is often considered one of the most important pieces of legislation in the history of the United States. The Homestead Act, enacted during the Civil War in 1862, provided that any adult (21 years or older) citizen, or intended citizen, who had never borne arms against the U.S. government could claim 160 acres of surveyed government land. Claimants were required to “improve” the plot by building a dwelling and cultivating the land. After 5 years on the land, the original filer was entitled to the property, free and clear, except for a small registration fee. Title could also be acquired after only a 6-month residency and trivial improvements, provided the claimant paid the government \$1.25 per acre. After the Civil War, Union soldiers could deduct the time they had served from the residency requirements. Settlers from all walks of life including newly arrived immigrants, farmers without land of their own from the East, single

women and former slaves came to meet the challenge of "proving up" and keeping this "free land". Eventually 270 million acres, or 10% of the area of the United States was claimed and settled under this act.

Kansas, which had been a sanctuary for runaways during the Civil War, was the closest western state to the Old South that allowed African Americans to homestead in the 1870's. Thousands of African Americans chose to relocate there because they believed it to be free of racial restrictions and violence. As *The Topeka Colored Citizen* said, "Our advice . . . to the people of the South, Come West, Come to Kansas . . . it is better to starve to death in Kansas than be shot and killed in the South."

One of the most famous black settlements in Kansas is the town of Nicodemus. Named for a legendary African prince who had been sold into slavery and eventually purchased his own freedom, Nicodemus was founded in 1877 by a white developer and a group of black homesteaders from Lexington, Kentucky. By 1879 the town had a population of 600 people.

Nicodemus became an important symbol of self-governance and economic success for African Americans. One of the most successful citizens of Nicodemus was Anderson Boles, who arrived in Nicodemus without any resources and became the owner of a local hotel, 75 acres of land, and 19 hogs. Anticipating the construction of the Missouri Pacific Railroad, the town boomed. In 1879 there were twenty-five houses and both a Baptist and a Methodist Church. In addition two drugstores, three grocery stores, a bank, a hotel, and two newspapers were established.

In the 1880s, Nicodemus underwent a steady decline. 40 percent of the wheat crop was destroyed by the winter blizzards of 1885. Two years later, the Missouri Pacific Railroad bypassed the town and Nicodemus's fate was sealed. After 1888, local boosters ceased trying to attract new settlers, and prominent citizens left the area.

The history of Nicodemus is re-visited every year at "Homecoming," which is celebrated during the first week of August. At that celebration, descendants of Nicodemus residents come from all over the United States to participate in the reunion. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1975, Nicodemus stands as the only entirely African American community in Kansas.

#### **References:**

National Park Service, Homestead National Park of America

[http://www.nps.gov/home/homestead\\_act.html](http://www.nps.gov/home/homestead_act.html)

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, In Motion: The African American Migration Experience

<http://www.inmotionaame.org/migrations/landing.cfm?migration=6&bhpc=1>

## Motivation

Display Teacher Resource Sheet #1: *All Colored People That Want to Go to Kansas*. Ask:

- When did this advertisement appear?
- In what town and state did it appear?
- To whom was this advertisement geared?
- What was being advertised?

## Development

1. Explain to students that in the late 1800's the Homestead Act gave people the opportunity to acquire free land. The act stated that anyone over the age of 21 could claim and settle on 160 acres of land on the Plains for free if they lived and worked on it for 5 years. Kansas was an area where that free land was located.
2. Have a student locate Kentucky on a United States map. Next have them locate Kansas. Ask:
  - Why do you think people took advantage of this opportunity?
  - What types of transportation might have the people used to get the free land?
3. Explain to students that after the Civil War, the Homestead Act was important for African Americans because it offered them an opportunity for them to own their own land. The price of farmland in the South was often too expensive for newly freed slaves to buy. In addition, African Americans continued to receive unfair treatment. Moving to the West gave them hope for the future. This advertisement and others like it encouraged African Americans to move to Kansas. The African Americans who chose to move West were known as Exodusters.
4. Tell students that many African American homesteaders thought one town in Kansas, Nicodemus, sounded like a good place to settle. The story *Wagon Wheels* is based on the true story of an African American family from Kentucky who moved to Nicodemus.
5. Distribute Student Resource Sheet #1: *Wagon Wheels: An Artful Reflection*. Explain to students that after reading *Wagon Wheels*, they will fill in this graphic organizer. As they read, they should be thinking of pictures to draw that illustrate the beginning of the story, the middle of the story, and the end of the story.
6. After students have finished the book, help them complete Student Resource Sheet #1, reminding them to write a descriptive sentence for each of their illustrations. Have volunteers share their work.

7. Divide students into groups. Distribute one copy of Student Resource Sheet #2: *Productive Resources* to each group. Review natural, capital, and human resources with students. (See Teacher Background.) Have them write the definition of each type of resource in the second row of the chart. Distribute Student Resource Sheets #3a-d among the groups. Have students cut out the pictures and place them in the appropriate boxes on Student Resource Sheet #2: *Productive Resources*. Have student groups report out to the class.
8. Tell students that productive resources were also used to build homes. Ask students to revisit the section of *Wagon Wheels* (pages 13-15) that deals with the building of a dugout. Tell them that it took a combination of natural, capital, and human resources to build a dugout. Distribute Student Resource Sheet #4: *Production Chart*. Have students complete the activity. Check for understanding.
10. **Assessment:** Have students respond to the following prompt.

The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture is sponsoring an exhibit on the African Americans who moved West after the Civil War (Exodusters). They have asked your class to write a short article about the Exodusters for elementary school children. Your article should include the following:

- At least 2 reasons why African Americans chose to move West
- How the settlers used natural, human, and capital resources to build their homes

11. **Closure:** Have student volunteers share their articles with the class.

*All Colored People That Want to Go to Kansas*

**All Colored People**  
THAT WANT TO  
**GO TO KANSAS,**  
**On September 5th, 1877,**  
**Can do so for \$5.00**

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**IMMIGRATION.**

WHEREAS, We, the colored people of Lexington, Ky., knowing that there is an abundance of choice lands now belonging to the Government, have assembled ourselves together for the purpose of locating on said lands. Therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That we do now organize ourselves into a Colony, as follows:— Any person wishing to become a member of this Colony can do so by paying the sum of one dollar (\$1.00), and this money is to be paid by the first of September, 1877, in instalments of twenty-five cents at a time, or otherwise as may be desired.

RESOLVED. That this Colony has agreed to consolidate itself with the Nicodemus Towns, Solomon Valley, Graham County, Kansas, and can only do so by entering the vacant lands now in their midst, which costs \$5.00.

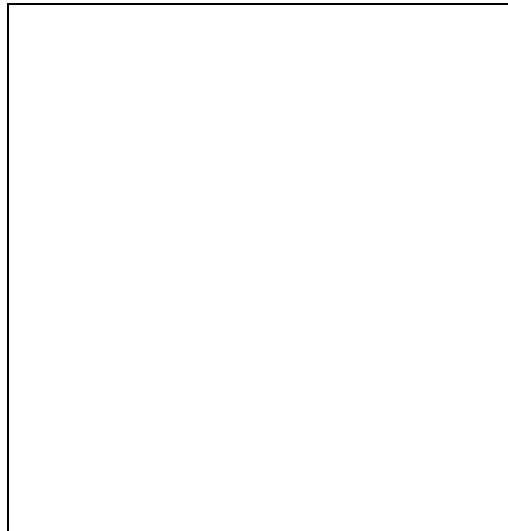
RESOLVED, That this Colony shall consist of seven officers—President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and three Trustees. President—M. M. Bell; Vice-President—Isaac Talbott; Secretary—W. J. Niles; Treasurer—Daniel Clarke; Trustees—Jerry Lee, William Jones, and Abner Webster.

RESOLVED, That this Colony shall have from one to two hundred militia, more or less, as the case may require, to keep peace and order, and any member failing to pay in his dues, as aforesaid, or failing to comply with the above rules in any particular, will not be recognized or protected by the Colony.

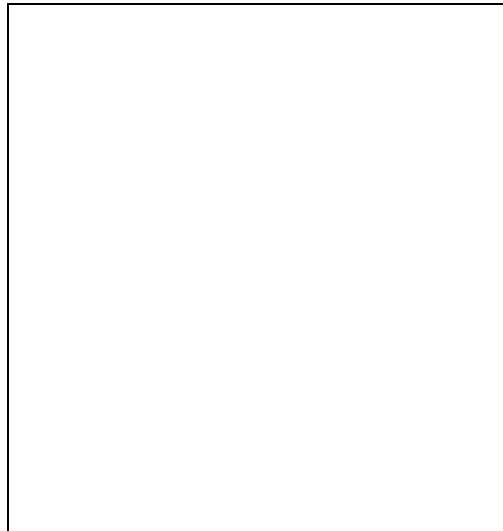
<http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Schomburg/text/migration9big.html>

***Wagon Wheels: An Artful Reflection***

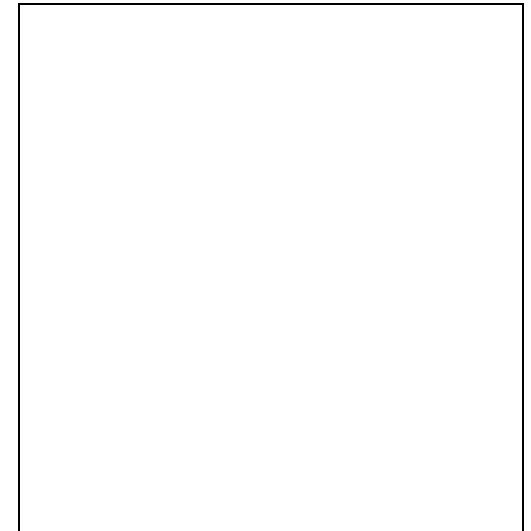
**Beginning Illustration**



**Middle Illustration**



**End Illustration**



**Write about each picture:**

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Student Resource Sheet #2

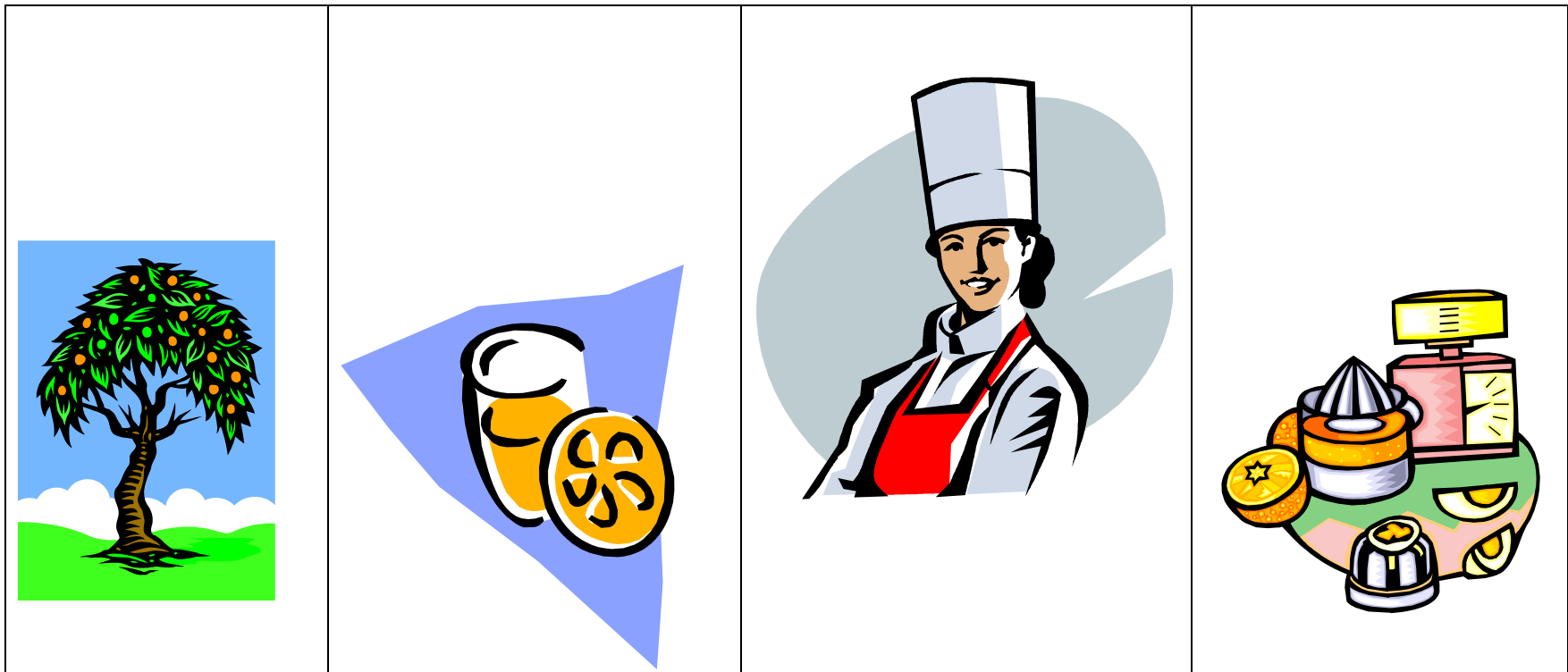
***Productive Resources***

Natural Resources	Capital Resources	Human Resources	Product



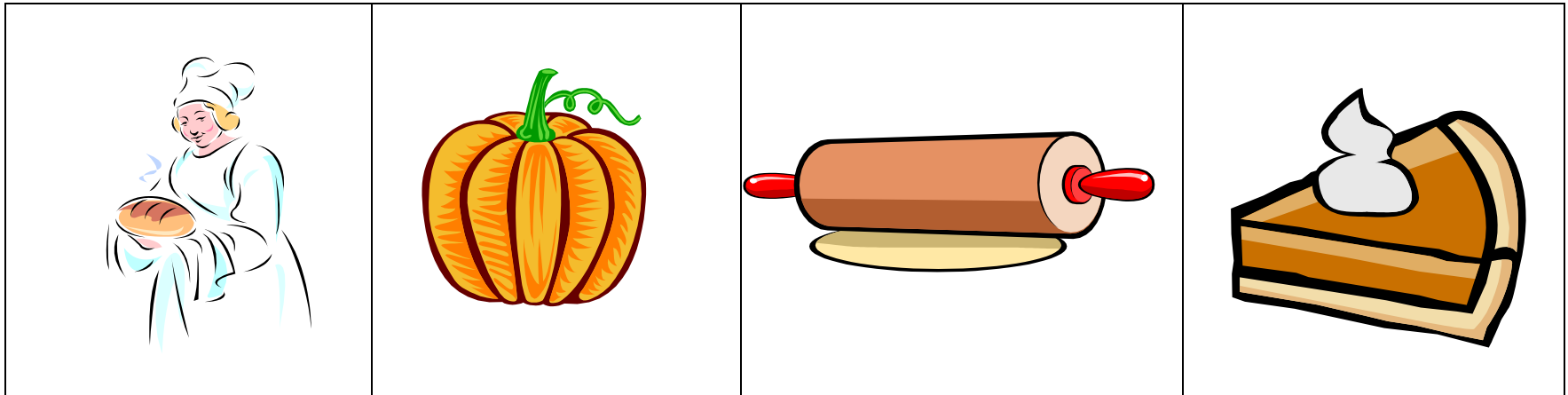
## ***Orange Juice***

Directions: Cut the pictures apart and paste them in the correct boxes on Student Resource Sheet #2.



## *Pumpkin Pie*

Directions: Cut the pictures apart and paste them in the correct boxes on Student Resource Sheet #2.



Student Resource Sheet #3c

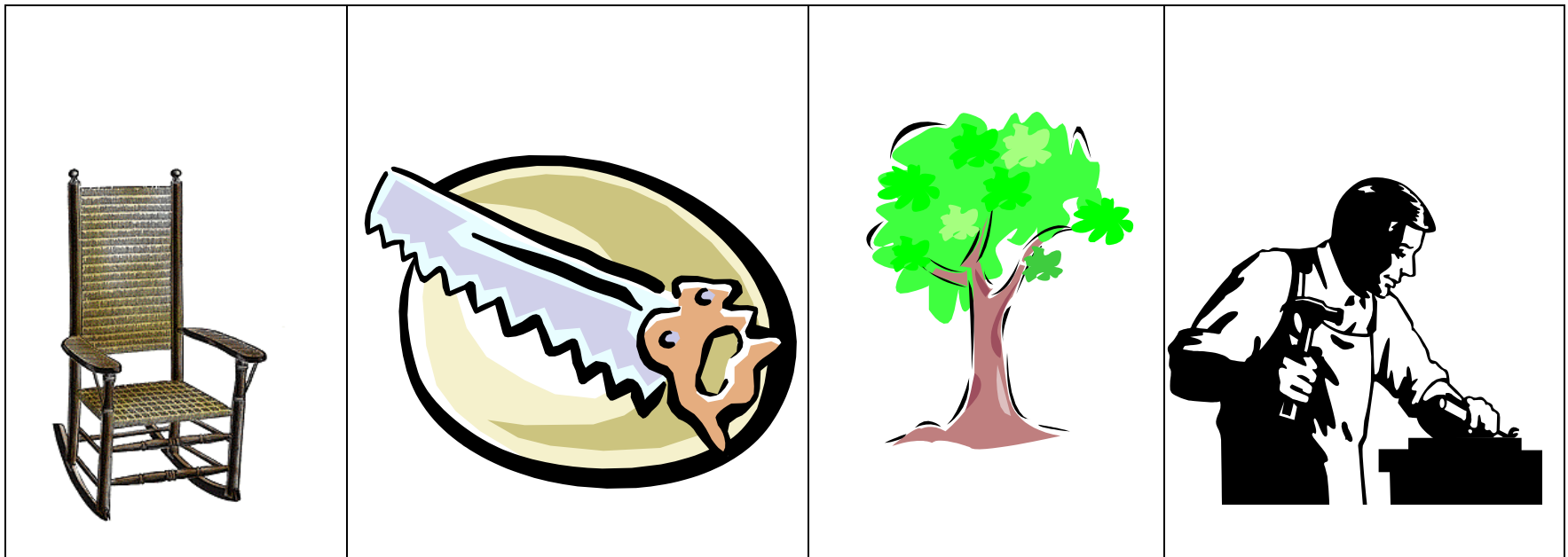
**Shirt**

Directions: Cut the pictures apart and paste them in the correct boxes on Student Resource Sheet #2.



## *Rocking Chair*

Directions: Cut the pictures apart and paste them in the correct boxes on Student Resource Sheet #2.



**Production Chart**

**Building a Dugout**

The dugout was a room dug in the side of a hill. A few rails or posts were used to make the frame and possibly a window. The front wall was made of grass that was cut into squares. A roof sloping back onto the hill was made with poles covered with brush and prairie grass thick enough to hold dirt. Another layer of dirt was placed over the grass.

**Directions:**

1. Use what you learned from the story and the information above to draw a picture of the resources needed to build a dugout.
2. Write a sentence that explains the production process.

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**Natural Resources**

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**Capital Resources**

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**Human Resources**

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