Students will analyze historical data from primary and secondary sources to determine the factors contributing to the rise and fall of ghost towns in North Dakota.

Historical Skills	Historical Question	Standards
Learning context Examine critically Make a claim	What were the primary factors that contributed to the rise and fall of towns in North Dakota, and how can we use these lessons to understand the development of modern communities?	ND.6_12.1.2 Explain the human settlement patterns in North Dakota. ND.6_12.1.3 Interpret current thematic maps to identify where people live and work and how land is used. ND.6_12.4.6 Use various primary and secondary resources to acquire, analyze, and evaluate information.

Objectives
- Analyze and interpret historical data (railroad maps, grain prices, weather reports, and transportation routes) to explain the rise and fall of towns in North Dakota.
- Apply critical thinking skills to synthesize information and draw conclusions about why certain towns became ghost towns.
- Discuss the impact of transportation and economy on town development and decline.

Supplies
- Ghosts of North Dakota website for town profiles
- Wamduska newspaper article
- "The Two Sanishes"
- Omemee from ND Studies
- Manfred website
- Information on Gascoyne
- Land grants to railroads and wagon trails
- "1994 North Dakota Railroad Map"
- "Railroad and County Map, Dakota Territory," 1879
- "Railroad and County Map, Dakota Territory," 1889
- "Railroad Commissioners' Map of North Dakota," 1913
- "Railroad Commissioners' Map of North Dakota," 1935

- Modern road map
- Crop and population data by town and county, 1908
- Crops and population data by county, 1915
- Annual North Dakota climate data
- Wheat prices
- Paper and writing instruments

Setup
- Determine how the students will be divided into six groups.
- Have physical or digital copies of the primary and secondary sources that will be used for research.

Background
As settlers flocked to the Great Plains in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many communities were established in hopes of prosperity. The expansion of the railroads, the Homestead Act, and the promise of fertile farmland encouraged people to move into North Dakota. Many small towns grew as businesses, schools, and churches were established to serve burgeoning populations. However, economic shifts, changing transportation routes, and natural disasters caused many of these settlements to gradually fade.

Many North Dakota ghost towns occurred during the early to mid-20th century as the state's agricultural economy faced significant challenges. The Great Depression, coupled with the prolonged droughts of the Dust Bowl era, devastated the livelihoods of farmers and caused many to abandon their land. With the decline of farming and the eventual mechanization of agriculture, small towns that had once relied on a stable rural population lost their residents as people sought work in larger cities or left the state entirely. The construction of Interstate 94 also bypassed several smaller towns, further isolating them from economic opportunities. Today, many of these ghost towns remain as silent reminders of the past, with crumbling buildings and empty streets bearing witness to the rapid rise and eventual decline of rural life in North Dakota.

Activity

1. Ask students to define what a "ghost town" is and what might cause a town to decline.
2. Have students brainstorm possible reasons for the abandonment of towns, such as economic downturns, natural disasters, or changes in transportation.
3. Write their ideas on the board.
4. Introduce the topic of ghost towns in North Dakota, emphasizing how railroad construction, agriculture, and weather patterns played significant roles in the growth and decline of towns in the state.
5. Split the class into six groups, each focusing on one of the following towns: Omemee, Sanish, Wamduska, Sims, Manfred, and Bucyrus.
6. Give each group a set of resources (maps, historical grain prices, weather reports, etc.) and a brief town profile. Each group will use these resources to understand the factors that contributed to the rise and fall of their assigned ghost town.
7. Have the students research their assigned town using the resources. They should consider factors such as:
   - **Railroad maps:** Was the town on a major railroad route? Did it lose its importance as railroads shifted or closed lines?
   - **Grain prices and agricultural trends:** Was the economy dependent on a particular crop (e.g., wheat, barley)? Did fluctuations in grain prices or agricultural output affect the town's survival?
   - **Weather reports/climate data:** Was the area prone to drought, floods, or other extreme weather events that could have hindered farming or made life difficult?
   - **Transportation routes:** Did the construction of major highways or new rail lines bypass the town, contributing to its decline?
8. After researching, students should discuss within their groups:
   - What were the main reasons their assigned town became a ghost town?
   - Were there any unique factors specific to their town that made it different from others?
   - What role did transportation, economy, and weather play?
9. Each group will create a timeline of events in the town's history that include the key factors of the town's rise and fall.
10. Have each group share their timeline or do a carousel activity where groups analyze the various timelines looking for patterns.
11. After all groups have presented, lead a class discussion about the factors that seem to have the greatest influence on a town's survival or decline.
12. Summarize by explaining that ghost towns are a testament to the changing landscapes of human settlement and economic conditions.
13. As an exit ticket, have the students write a paragraph on the factor they think most contributed to the decline of towns in North Dakota and how they feel small towns today may avoid a similar fate.

Reflection questions

1. Can the decline of small communities in North Dakota be avoided today through government policies, technological innovations, economic opportunities, or other means?
2. Analzye one or more small towns in your region. Why have the populations grown or declined over time?