



U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

Standards Addressed:
SS3.2, SS4.3, SS8.2, SS8.4, SS9.1

Oregon Trail

The National Historic Oregon Trail was used for westward migration across North America beginning in the 1840s. In this unit, students will learn about the Oregon Trail, evaluate transportation choices, design a journal, and analyze pioneer journals.

Objectives

- Students will learn about the Oregon Trail and will recognize related vocabulary.
- Students will compare animals which pulled wagons to make appropriate selections.
- Students will analyze primary documents and keep journals of their own experiences.

Preparation

Print the following handouts for each student.

- Oregon Trail Overview
- Oregon Trail Vocabulary
- Oregon Trail Word Find
- Wagons Ho!
- Journaling Activity

Cut paper and string as needed for journals.

Materials

Journal materials

- card stock
- string
- paper
- hole punch

Directions

Lesson One: Introduction to the Oregon Trail

Group read the *California Trail Overview*. Assign small groups to reflect on the guiding questions. Signal to groups that the reporter will be randomly selected from each group. Review *Questions* as a class.

Utilize the *Word Find* for individual work or homework.

Discussion Questions

- What motivated people to move to Oregon?
- How did people travel along this trail?
- Describe the trail with as many details as possible from the text.

Lesson Two: Wagons HO! In small groups assign students read and discuss the choices on the Wagons Ho! worksheet. Groups will select an animal and share their reasoning with the class.

Lesson Three: Journaling Review that the students should be looking for clues in the primary sources to support their answers to the questions. Allow students to work in small groups to complete the Journaling Activity. When finished with the worksheet, students should construct their own journal by folding together half-sheets of white paper with a card stock cover. Punch holes along the fold and utilize the string to tie the papers together. Use the journaling prompts for students to begin their journals.



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Oregon Trail Overview

The Oregon Trail stretches for nearly 2,000 miles from east to west across the middle of North America. It is estimated to have had between 200,000 and 500,000 travelers between 1830 and 1870. Travel along the trail by wagon and horseback was rough and tedious. Young families would join groups called wagon trains to make the journey easier.

In the earlier years of the trail, families had to prepare all their supplies for the journey. Women spent many months weaving cloth and preparing enough food for six months of travel. Men repaired wagons and carefully prepared items for packing. Later as the “jumping off” towns became more prominent the preparations for travel became easier. Instead of the many months of preparation, families would buy travel supplies in these towns. Prairie schooners, a lightweight travel wagon, became available for sale, as well as wagon canvases, tools, and dried or salted food supplies.

Amazingly, these wagon trains connected a route from the east to the west along the original Native American trails. Trail information was passed along from the area natives to mountain men and explorers and eventually became the famous route known as the Oregon Trail. The trail closely followed river routes. Most importantly it passed through South Pass, an inclined plain through the Rocky Mountain Range. Wagons could travel safely through this pass.

In 1832, Captain Benjamin Bonneville led the first wagon train over South Pass to the west. He was followed by the Applegate party in the Great Migration of 1843. Travel continued to grow until the completion of the railroad in 1869.

Several events encouraged families to immigrate to the Oregon territory. The first was the economic panic of 1837. Many families lost their farms and needed land. The second was the Donation Land Law of 1850. Families willing to settle in the Oregon territory were given 640 acres of **FREE** land. Many people saw this as an opportunity to make a better life. Also, the increased awareness of the term coined by John L. O’Sullivan in 1844, “Manifest Destiny” promoted travel to Oregon. Patriotic citizens believed it was their duty to move the development of the country westward. Others just wanted to experience the thrill of the travel and discover new places.



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Oregon Trail Vocabulary

acre	• measurement of land equal to 4,047 square feet
bacon	• pork preserved in brine or salt
cholera	• an infectious disease-causing profuse diarrhea, vomiting and muscle cramps that often leads to death
Conestoga wagon	• an old heavy commercial wagon
Continental Divide	• a series of mountain ranges dividing North America
economic panic	• a fear of the collapse of the financial system
emigrant	• a person who leaves their country to settle in another
game	• meat of wild animals
jumping off towns	• towns where emigrants began their wagon journey west
Manifest Destiny	• the belief that the United States should extend from east to west coast
mountain man	• man who lived in the mountains hunting and trapping
mule	• a hybrid of a donkey and a horse
nooning	• a rest period taken at the lunch break
outfit (wagon)	• gathering supplies
oxen	• a cow (bovine) trained to pull a wagon
pioneer	• someone who moves to an unknown territory to settle
prairie schooner	• a narrow-covered wagon used to cross North America
settler	• someone who establishes residence or lives in a new area
South Pass	• the pass through the Rocky Mountains located in Wyoming
wagon train	• a group of emigrants traveling together by wagon
yoke	• a pair of draft animals





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Oregon Trail Word Find

Find the hidden words within the grid of letters.

Y T S G N T E R A A V R R E C
E N E O A O L L C T H E E C O
K A I E U M O R U O R N E O N
O R R T E T E N G M M O N N E
Y G E O S N H T I O R O O S
A I L I L E R P U N Q H I M T
C M T M T V D N A V G C P I O
H E T B W P T T O S C S J C G
O E E T Z A M U S H S E N P A
L U S T I F T U O E N I M A W
E Y O N B A C O N G F R F N A
R C M W A G O N T R A I N I G
A A K B Z S C N J G M A N C O
N F F O G N I P M U J R S A N
Y N E X O N C A Y A L P O P M

Write the letters from left to right which are not circled to discover a message.

ACRE
 BACON
 CHOLERA
 YOKE
 WAGON TRAIN

EMIGRANT
 GAME
 JUMPING OFF
 OXEN
 MOUNTAIN MAN

MULE
 NOONING
 OUTFIT
 SETTLER
 PIONEER

PRAIRIE SCHOONER
 ECONOMIC PANIC
 SOUTH PASS
 CONESTOGA WAGON
 MANIFEST DESTINY



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Wagons Ho!

Who is going to pull your wagon?

Oxen

Cost: 2 yoke minimum
\$25/animal



Slow, steady, reliable
Tastes great
Fast-food eater (*mmm that strange plant looks good!*)
Cooperative worker
Works best in a yoke

Horse

Cost: \$200 a head



Finicky eater (*needs expensive grain supplements*)
Tires easily under strain
Fast runner
Highly valued by the Plains Indians

Mule

Cost: 8-10 head needed
\$75/mule



Can eat fast-food but prefers specialty grasses and grains
Works well in pairs but needs many friends to pull heavy loads
Stubborn temperament
Fast worker

What animal do you chose? _____

Name four reasons for your choice.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



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Journaling Activity

Read the following excerpts of pioneer journals as they traveled west through Wyoming. The spelling is in the original form and may seem different than modern writing. Consider the similarities and differences to answer the discussion questions.

Discussion Questions:

- From the descriptions of the trail, how may the realities of life have affected what the journalists wrote in their diaries?
- What topics were written about by the men and women?
- How are the concerns of the men and women similar? How are they different?
- Does the child write about the same topics as the adults?

Woman's Diary Example: Amelia Hadley 1851

"Monday July 20 Traveled 14 miles and camped on a creek, not very good water, nor grass, plenty of wild wheat, which our teams eat the head of. The sick still recovering. Do not feel very well my self. am afraid I am going to be sick from the constant fatigue, am not strong no why

Tuesday July 21 Traveled 25 miles had very good road or M. could not have stood it to have rode so far, gets very much fatigued before we stop to camp still getting better have to handle him very careful. Am no better myself, feel as though I could not hold out much longer I have the flux, which is fast running me down am doctoring for it, but does me no good as yet.

Wednesday July 22 A beautiful fine day and Mell much better, so that it does not hurt him much o travel, or ride as he is comfortable in the carriage I have the mountain fever the Doct. Say with the flux, and am not able to set up, and hurts me very bad to ride yesterday camped on snake river, I am not hardly able to keep journal to day we travel down the river, From where the road strikes river 6 ¼ rds to small creek, plenty of water above and below crossing the road is level, but deep, dust & some sand no grass except on the margin of the river do not know the exact distance we have travelled, to day, shall be brief in my descriptions."

Man's Diary Example: William Quesenbury 1850

"June 20. Thursday 30 [miles] . . . Sun two hours high when we started. Followed the same trail as yesterday over a very rolling country. Antelopes continue very abundant. The road is very winding for a long time going N.W. and then turning E.N.E. for two or three miles. Nooned on a sluggish branch [Coal Creek]. Made coffee as the water was not fit to drink. Buckner cooked a curlew which I killed on the way. It hailed tremendous hard and large—staked our animals to prevent them stampeding in the hail. I killed a pheasant [grouse] near a stream [Boulder Creek] which we crossed a few miles from the branch we nooned on, and after coming about a mile further Buckner shot a deer down. Took the hams. Stopped and cooked in a little hollow to the right of the road. There was water, but it was unfit to drink. As soon as dark came on we struck N.E. for some timber we observed before night. Found grass there nearly waist high."

Child's Diary Example: Sallie Hester (14 years old) 1849

"June 21. Left camp and started over the Black Hills, sixty miles over the worst road in the world. Have again struck the Platte and followed it until we came to the ferry. Where we had a great deal of trouble swimming our cattle across, taking our wagons to pieces, unloading and replacing our traps. A number of accidents happened here. A lady and four children were drowned through the carelessness of those in charge of the ferry.

July 2. Passed Independence Rock. This rock is covered with names. With great difficulty I found a place to cut mine. Twelve miles from this is Devil's Gate. It's an opening in the mountain through which the Sweetwater River flows. Several of us climbed this mountain –somewhat perilous for youngsters not over fourteen. We made our way to the very edge of the cliff and looked down. We could hear the water dashing, splashing, and roaring as if angry at the small space through which it was forced to pass. We were gone so long that the train was stopped and men sent out in search of us.

Mary Powel 1856 (12 years old)

"Each day I took pains to watch the women bake bread in their bake-kettles. I knew that I should have to do the baking when our own kettle came and I was anxious to learn. . .I took the kettle and went off. . .took dough and made twenty four beautiful brown biscuits. I was glad as glad could be. I took the biscuits to camp and surprised mother."

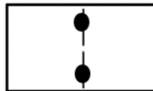
Construct Your Own Journal: Create a simple journal to document your day.

1.



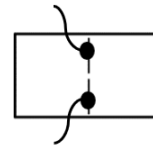
Fold recycled paper.

2.



Punch holes along the fold.

3.



Thread string through the holes. Tie to bind pages.

Write about your life and daily concerns. Use the prompt to get started in your journal. Write about what is important to you.

Date: _____ Place: _____

This morning I . . .

Sequencing words:

- first, second, third
- before/ after
- then
- next
- lastly
- finally
- morning/afternoon/evening

Sources: Fletcher, Patricia K. Fletcher, Jack E., and Lee Whiteley. *Cherokee Trail Diaries Vol 1, Vol 2*. Caldwell, ID: Fletcher Family Foundation. Kimball, Violet T. *Stories of Young Pioneers in Their Own Words*. 2000. Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company. Holmes, Kenneth L. Ed. *Covered Wagon Women Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails, 1851. 1984. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.*



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Oregon Trail Word Find Answer Key

Find the hidden words within the grid of letters.

Y	T	S	G	N	T	E	R	A	A	V	R	R	E	C
E	N	E	A	O	L	L	C	T	H	E	E	C	O	
K	A	E	U	M	O	R	U	O	R	N	E	O	N	
O	R	T	E	T	E	N	G	M	M	O	N	N	E	
Y	G	O	S	N	H	T	I	O	R	O	O	S		
A	I	L	I	L	E	R	P	U	N	Q	H	I	M	T
C	M	T	M	T	V	E	N	A	V	G	C	P	I	O
H	E	T	B	W	P	T	O	S	C	S	J	C	G	
O	E	T	Z	A	M	U	S	H	S	E	N	P	A	
L	U	S	T	I	F	T	U	O	E	N	I	M	A	W
L	Y	O	N	B	A	C	O	N	G	E	R	F	N	A
E	C	H	W	A	G	O	N	T	R	A	I	N	I	G
A	A	K	B	Z	S	C	N	J	G	M	A	N	C	O
N	F	F	O	G	N	I	P	M	U	J	E	S	A	N
Y	N	E	X	O	N	C	A	Y	A	L	P	O	P	M

T r a v e l t h e O r e g o n T r a i l

ACRE
BACON
CHOLERA
YOKE
WAGON TRAIN

EMIGRANT
GAME
JUMPING OFF
OXEN
MOUNTAIN MAN

MULE
NOONING
OUTFIT
SETTLER
PIONEER

PRAIRIE SCHOONER
ECONOMIC PANIC
SOUTH PASS
CONESTOGA WAGON
MANIFEST DESTINY



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