



Packing the Overland Trail Wagon (3-5)

Pioneers who made the decision to travel west had to make some tough choices about what to bring as they packed up their lives for a start somewhere new. In this activity, students will weigh make decisions about what to pack and calculate total weight as they make decisions about what to pack in their wagon before heading west.

Preparation:

For added understanding, you can tape a 10' x 4' rectangle onto the floor to give students a visual for the available space in the wagon.

1. Print Pgs. 2-7 (one per each group of students).

Materials:

- Pencil
- Handouts
- Scratch Paper

Discussion Questions:

- What choices did the emigrants make to prepare for their journey? What are some consequences for choosing certain supplies over others?
- Why did emigrants decide to travel West? What were they wanting to find?
- How did the Oregon Trail change our society?

Directions/Activity Overview:

1. Review the difference between a **NEED** and a **WANT**.
NEED- something we must have to survive
WANT - something that is desired, but not necessary for survival
2. Review the background information and Missouri Gazette editorial with students to set the stage for the activity.
3. Have students discuss the limited space, and what kinds of items might take priority over others. Draw student attention to the taped rectangle on the floor (if you made it). This is the only space they have available to pack for the upcoming journey.
4. Students will work in teams to make their selections and calculate the total weight for their wagon.
5. Reconvene the group for discussion and sharing.





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Background Information (Pack the Wagon!)

Welcome to Independence, Missouri! Today we are getting ready to go head West to Oregon City, Oregon to start a new life. The date is May 20, 1843. It will take us about 5 months to cover around 2,000 miles. We need to make it to Oregon before winter and the bad weather. Out on the trail, we will be camping every night, rain or shine. We need to pack everything we need. There are no stores or hotels along the way. Also, we must be prepared to bring enough food for the journey. No grocery stores or restaurants on the trail!

Before we go, we need to pack our wagon. This small space is the only room we have to pack our supplies. A typical wagon held over 2,000 pounds. They were made of wood and iron. Oxen and mules were used to pull the wagons because horses ate too much, were too picky of eaters, and were too expensive to maintain on the journey. There will be no room to ride, except for infants and the elderly. We must utilize every space we can. No room for unnecessary things!

As you start to think about what you will bring, keep in mind:

- Thousands of people traveled each year from May to October, covering 15 miles a day.
- There were no grocery stores or restaurants on the trail. Families needed to pack all of their supplies in the wagon before leaving on their journey.
- A typical wagon held over 2,000 pounds and measured 10' long by 4' wide and 2' deep.
- Oxen were much cheaper, heartier, and easier to maintain along the journey than horses.
- Access to doctors and medical supplies was limited. Pioneers had to care for the health and safety of their families the best they could.
- Life on the trail was tedious. For entertainment, kids would read, play games, sing, and talk with friends.



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Background Information (Pack the Wagon!)

Read the article below from the St. Joseph, Missouri Gazette (March 19, 1847).

Missouri Gazette

St. Joseph, Missouri

March 19, 1847

Mr. Editor; Subjoined you will find a list of the principle articles necessary for an outfit to Oregon or California, which may be useful to some of your readers. It has been carefully prepared from correct information derived from intelligent persons who have made the trip.

The wagons should be new, made of thoroughly seasoned timber, and well ironed and not too heavy; with good tight beds, strong bows, and large double sheets. There should be at least four yoke of good oxen to each wagon - one yoke to be considered as extra, and to be used only in cases of emergency. Every family should have at least two good milk cows, as milk is a great luxury on the road.

The amount of provisions should be as follows; to each person except infants:

200 pounds of bread stuff (flour and crackers)

100 pounds of bacon

12 pounds of coffee

12 pounds of sugar

Each family should also take the following articles in proportions to the number as follows:

From 1 to 5 pounds tea

From 10 to 50 pounds rice

From 1/2 to 2 bushels beans

From 1/2 to 2 bushels dried fruit

From 1/2 to 5 pounds saleratus

From 5 to 50 pounds soap

Cheese, dried pumpkins, onions and a small portion of corn meal may be taken by those who desire them. The latter article, however, does not keep well.

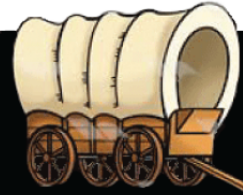
No furniture should be taken, and as few cooking utensils as are indispensably needed. Every family ought to have a sufficient supply of clothing for at least one year after their arrival, as everything of that kind is high in those countries. Some few cattle should be driven for beef, but much loose stock will be a great annoyance. Some medicines should also be found in every family, the kind and quantity may be determined by consulting the family physician.

I would suggest to each family the propriety of taking a small sheet-iron cooking stove with fixtures, as the wind and rain often times renders it almost impossible to cook without them, they are light and cost but little. All the foregoing articles may be purchased on good terms in this place.

Bureau of Land Management, Vale District et al. (2016)



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Pack Your Wagon!

Directions:

As a team, you will pack a wagon for a family of 4. Decide as a team what you will bring in your wagon, and what you will leave behind. Review the item description list and consider the letter to the editor as you plan your packing. Remember... your oxen can only carry 2,400 pounds without injury.

As you get ready to pack... think about these questions:

1. What would be the most important things you would take with you? Why are they important?

2. Think about the options below. Rank them in order of importance. 1= most important, 6=least important.

	Being hungry
	Feeling cold and wet
	Not having favorite or meaningful personal belongings
	Not feeling safe
	Being stranded
	Feeling bored





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Pack Your Wagon!

Food Supply

Item	Description
Apple Vinegar	Used for food processing and canning, a topical antibiotic for cuts and scrapes, a flavoring ingredient.
Bacon	Salted bacon was a good long term food product. It was a popular food substance on the trail. The salt helped keep it from spoiling.
Beans	Good source of protein. One sack of beans provides a large number of servings.
Coffee	Highly sought after and desired good. Great for morale boosting.
Flour	Used to make bread, hardtack, and cooking meals.
Lard	Used for cooking, similar to butter.
Salt	Used for cooking and preserving meals.
Sugar	Used in baking and flavoring.
Tea	Used to flavor water. Less popular after War of 1812.
Rice	Used for cooking.
Water	The trail followed fresh waterways, however, water was not always available,
Dried Meat	Dried meat kept longer than fresh meat. Good source of protein.
Eggs	Good protein. Used in baking and cooking. A fresh item that didn't last long.
Dried Fruit	Popular treat on the trail. Dried fruit lasted longer than fresh.
Cornmeal	Used for baking and cooking. Eggs and other things could be packed in cornmeal to keep them from breaking.



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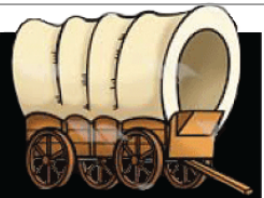
Pack Your Wagon!

Dry Goods & Sundries

Item	Description
Bedroll	Travelers camped out daily, rain or shine.
Blacksmith Tools	Used to fix wagon parts and other items.
Books	To alleviate boredom on the trail. Several families also brought Bibles.
Medicine	In case of illness or disease. Many medicinal treatments were homemade such as essence of peppermint, which was used to cure stomach aches. Disease was the number one killer of emigrants on the trails.
Cast Iron Stove	For cooking meals. Made of iron and very heavy.
Chair	For comfort and to decorate the new home.
Cookware	Pots, pans and similar materials to cook food.
Grandmother's Clock	Tells time and is a precious family heirloom.
Gun Making Tools	To repair weapons.
Box of Toys	Dolls, wooden toys, puzzles.
Mirror	A family keepsake and high-value item.
Gunpowder	Needed for weapons, but is explosive when exposed to fire.
Tent	Helped protect from rain and outside weather during rest periods.
Rope	Tying down supplies inside the wagon and various other uses.
Fishing gear	The trails followed waterways out West. Catching fish was a possibility in some areas and a good source of food.
Extra clothing	Pants, shirts, socks, and shoes. Life on the trail was tough on clothing, walking for miles took its toll on shoes and other clothing.
Musical Instruments	Listening to music was a popular method to help pass the time.



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Pack Your Wagon!

Fill out the sheet by calculating the total weight you would like to bring. Add subtotals for each category to calculate your overall weight. Remember the weight cannot exceed 2,400 pounds. Record your total weight.

Food Supply		
Item	Weight in lbs	Total lbs packed
Apple Vinegar	25	
Bacon	400	
Beans	120	
Coffee	80	
Dried Fruit	100	
Flour	500	
Lard	200	
Salt	50	
Sugar	60	
Tea	20	
Rice	200	
Water	100	
Dried Meat	200	
Eggs	50	
Cornmeal	200	
SUBTOTAL		

Dry Goods & Sundries		
Item	Weight in lbs	Total lbs packed
Bedroll	15	
Blacksmith Tools	200	
Books	75	
Medicine	10	
Cast Iron Stove	300	
Chairs	20	
Cookware/Utensils	75	
Clock	15	
Gun-making Tools	200	
Box of toys	40	
Mirror	15	
Gunpowder	80	
Tent	150	
Rope	30	
Fishing Gear	15	
Extra Clothing	50	
Musical Instrument	60	
SUBTOTAL		

TOTAL WEIGHT: _____



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