

Traveling the Oregon Trail



Thematic Unit for Grades 7-10

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Introduction

This thematic unit was created for a 7th—10th grade United States History class. These lessons were designed for a 40 minute class period. Feel free to adjust the lesson lengths to fit your classroom schedule.

“Traveling the Oregon Trail” takes the students on a journey along the Oregon Trail. Some of the assignments and projects they will complete include:

- Designing and creating a covered wagon
- Keeping a journal of their traveling experiences
- Learning about the various diseases of that time period
- Earning their Pathfinder Rocks and Minerals Honor
- Cooking Pioneer and Native American recipes
- Reading Pioneer Diaries
- Teaching a lower grades classroom Pioneer Games

Room Décor

Decorate the classroom with wagon wheels, tumbleweeds (dried weeds), coils of rope, and student’s covered wagons. Have the students “send” postcards and letters to family and friends back home.



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Daily Activities

Journaling:

Have the students randomly draw a situation card daily from a woven basket. In their journals the students need to respond how they are/ have dealt with the situation on the card. They can also add feelings and other reactions in the journal as well.

Note: Situation Cards have a variety of situations that the students might have encountered while traveling on the Oregon Trail. Write situations on cards for students to draw daily. The situations may vary from purchasing items to trading items to events that happen. You may have several of the same card in the basket.

Some ideas for situation cards:

- ◆ Broken wheel
- ◆ Ox dies
- ◆ Normal day (describe a normal day)
- ◆ Daughter is sick with scurvy
- ◆ No water
- ◆ Friends lose 3 cows
- ◆ Coyote kills 5 chickens in the middle of the night
- ◆ Son dies of cholera
- ◆ Trade 1 ax and a hat for 100 lb. of bacon
- ◆ Axle broke (you don't have a spare axle)
- ◆ River Swollen, you can't cross
- ◆ Heavy Rain, can't travel today
- ◆ Two Wagons lost crossing the river
- ◆ Terrible fog, can't travel
- ◆ Hostile Indians ahead
- ◆ Little Boy bitten by snake
- ◆ Four new families join your wagon train
- ◆ Find a natural spring
- ◆ Buy 15 lbs. of sugar
- ◆ Trade 2 pack mules for 1 new axle

Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet

The students need to keep track of any spending or trading that they do on their Travel Ledger. The students need to make sure that they have enough supplies with them to last them the entire journey.



Part 1

Preparing for Our Trip



Lessons

Should We Go or Should We Stay?

Introductory Lesson

Lesson Length: 1— 2 class periods

Objectives:

- The students will develop possible reasons for people pushing west in the mid-1800's.
- The students will begin to identify with the pioneers that traveled on the Oregon Trail through experience journaling.
- The students will study and discuss the pros and cons of traveling on the Oregon Trail.

Materials Needed:

- Students grouped into “families” (as the teacher you might want to group students into “families” before class begins)
- [Textbook \(American Nation, page 349\)](#)
- [Editorial worksheet](#)
- Cassette tape/CD/video with sounds of wagon train or stampede
- Journal

Procedure:

1. Have the students read in their textbook, [American Nation](#), page 349. Have the students brainstorm ideas as to why they think people would be pushing west.
2. Using the activity from page 349 in the student's textbook. Play the sound/video sample of a wagon train or a stampede. Before listening to the sample, ask the students to pretend that they are in the wagon train. Have them think about the following questions: Moving west looks like...? Moving west feels like...? Moving west smells like...? Moving west tastes like...? Moving west sounds like...? After the class has listened to the sound/video sample, have them complete the 5 senses activity by answering the above questions in their journal.



3. Ask for volunteers to share a couple of their responses.
4. Divide the class into family groups. Discuss with the students that in their families, they are going to have to decide if they are going to head west or stay in Missouri.
5. Pass out the [newspaper editorials](#) from different newspapers from around the United States and England. Have the students read the editorials in their family groups. After they have read the editorials as a family, they need to decide if they are going to head west or stay in Missouri, and give at least 4 reasons to support their decision.
6. After the students have completed their family decision paper, have one person from each family share their decision.
7. Tell the students that the decisions for many families wasn't easy. For those that chose to leave they were beginning a very difficult journey. The students will discover this in the coming weeks.

Assessment

- ◆ Grade the students journal response from the 5 senses activity based on child's ability.
- ◆ Grade the decision paper be looking for the following:
 - Good sentence structure
 - At least 4 solid reasons to support their families decision



It's Time to Shop and Plan!

Lesson Length: 6– 7 class periods (plus work time at home)

Objectives:

- The students will identify with a person traveling on the Oregon Trail through journaling.
- The students will brainstorm a list of items that they predict they will need to take with them on their journey.
- The students will learn the importance of planning ahead using a budget.
- The students will plan a budget using Microsoft Excel.
- The students will keep an accurate ledger of travel expenses.
- The students will demonstrate their research skills through using the internet and other research materials.
- The students will design a sketch of a covered wagon using graph paper and drawing the sketch to scale of an actual Conestoga wagon.
- The students will construct a model Conestoga wagon.

Materials Needed:

- Journal
- Access to Microsoft Excel
- [General Store Price List](#) (create into an overhead or enlarge and post in classroom)
- [Budget sheet for each student](#)
- Trade or repair card for each student (see attached card sheet)
- [Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet](#) (to use while traveling)
- Access to Internet
- Research material on Covered Wagons
- Graph paper
- Bluegrass/American Folk music CD

Procedure:

1. The students will take on the role of a character from this time period. They will record their feelings of getting ready to begin their long journey west in their Oregon Trail Journal. The time period will be around one year prior to leaving. While they are writing, have the music playing softly in the background. (DAILY)



2. Have students brainstorm a list of supplies they think they will need to take with them on the journey west. After, post the [General Store Price List](#) (same as the student's Oregon Trail Budget Sheet) on the board or overhead and discuss with students the various items on the list. Remind students that the pioneers traveling to Oregon had to take supplies with them to last them at least 4-6 months. These supplies would cost roughly \$800 - \$1,000. Explain to the students that people had to begin saving money and crops a few years prior to leaving. They had to be prepared to live without planting or harvesting crops for more than a year due to traveling and settling in.
3. The students will complete their own [budget sheet](#), using Microsoft Excel. The students will need to remember that they will need to save money to buy things along the way as well as pay for unexpected repairs. (ex. Broken wheel, axle)
***The students will need to draw a career type out of a jar randomly. The choices for career types are: Professional, Business, and Farmer. Establish an income for each career type, this will be the student's income to work with.
4. Collect the student's budgets.
5. Return the student's budget sheets as well as the [Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet](#) the following day with a trade or repair card attached. They will need to fix their budget accordingly. (Example: if they received a trade card that stated, "You traded 2 blankets for 3 boxes of bullets" the students would need to adjust their budget sheets to reflect the changes. If the student received a repair card that stated "broken tire: \$25 for new tire", the students would then adjust their Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet to reflect the change in the amount of cash that they have now.)
6. Explain to the students that they are going to construct their own covered wagon. Before they can construct their models they are going to have to first research about the wagons: What did they look like? How big were they? What type of wood was used? What type of material was used to cover the wagon? Have students use the internet and other research materials (encyclopedia, book on covered wagons, etc.) to research what a Conestoga wagon would look like. One website you might like to give your students for their research is:

<http://library.thinkquest.com/CR0210182/supplies.html>



7. After the students have researched about the Conestoga wagons, have them design a sketch using graph paper of what their model will look like: listing possible size, supplies, etc. Students will construct their models at home.
8. Give the students a list of things that you will be looking for on their models. (See assessment attachment for list.) Let students know that this project can be completed for under \$10.

Extension:

Connect the Past to the Present with the students by having them compare and contrast moving west in the 1800's to moving west today.

Have the students write letters to "family and friends" that stayed east. Post these letters on the bulletin board.

Assessments:

- ◆ Grade students on completion of budget.
- ◆ Model Wagon Project
An average grade (C range) will be given to students based on the following components:
 - sketch on graph paper with scale (i.e. how many boxes equal a foot) to be submitted with model
 - project turned in on time
 - neatness
 - materials/supplies used list
 - Is the project visually identifiable?
 - Projects includes: 4 wheels, 4 sides, cover, floorboard, hitch

Note: A higher grade will be given to those that go above and beyond the basic requirements.



Part 2

“Wagons Ho!” (Traveling on the Trail)



Lessons

Traveling the Trail

Lesson Length: 2-4 class periods

Objectives:

- The students will identify with a character that traveled on the Oregon Trail through journaling.
- The students will keep an accurate ledger of their travel expenses.
- The students will make comparisons between the past and the present with a given situation.
- The students will work in cooperative groups and instruct a lower grade classroom how to play a “pioneer game”.

Materials Needed:

- Journal
- [Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet](#) (from previous lesson)
- Situational Cards (problems/trades/purchases/surprises that might occur along the journey)
- [List of rules for Pioneer games](#)
- Bluegrass/American Folk Music CD

Procedure:

1. Return to the students their original Oregon Trail Budget. Attach the budget to the [Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet](#), as well as a situational card. The students will need to mark any costs of trades or purchases on their Ledger Sheet.
2. The students will take on the role of a person from this time period and record their feelings, as well as what was on their situational card, and their response to it. Play the Bluegrass/American Folk Music softly in the background while they are writing.
(DAILY)



3. Divide the class into cooperative groups. Each group needs to choose a pioneer game and learn the rules to teach a class of younger students.
4. Arrange a time with the lower grades teacher to have your class instruct the games. You may want to have one game learned a day.

Extension:

Have the students create charcoal drawings of things they might have seen as they traveled on the Oregon Trail.

Assessment:

- ◆ Check “Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet” for correct information.
- ◆ Do a journal check and give points for completing journal.



Mapping Our Trip to Oregon

Lesson Length: 3-4 class periods

For this lesson please see the following website for the lesson plan with everyone using the Oregon Trail.

<http://bg016.k12.sd.us/west.htm>



Hardships of Traveling

Lesson Length: 4-5 class periods

Objectives:

- The students will gain an understanding on the hardships and trials that the pioneers had to go through.
- The students will identify with a character that traveled on the Oregon Trail through journaling.
- The students will keep an accurate ledger of their travel expenses.
- The students will research common diseases that plagued the pioneers along the journey.
- The students will develop an understanding of how weather played an important factor in the pioneer's progress.
- The students will compare how weather would have effected the pioneers differently then today.

Resources/Materials Needed:

- Journal
- Student's Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet
- Situational Cards
- Access to Internet
- Encyclopedias
- [Chest of Hardships and Challenges](#)
- Bluegrass/American Folk Music CD

Procedure:

1. Return to the students their original Oregon Trail Budget. Attach to the budget the [Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet](#), as well as a situational card. The students will need to mark any costs of trades or purchases on their Ledger Sheet. (DAILY)



2. The students will take on the role of a character from this time period and record their feelings as well as what was on their situational card and their response to it. Play the music softly while they are writing in their journals. (DAILY)
3. Have the students brainstorm a list of possible hardships that they think the pioneers would have encountered along the way.
4. After the students have created a list categorize the list into 4 main groups: Trail, Weather, Diseases, and Common Mistakes. Discuss each group adding to the student's list if necessary. After discussing the hardships and challenges, ask the students how many of them would continue on with the journey? What challenges made you come to your decision? Ask the students to analyze how the types of weather that the pioneers experienced would effect us today.
5. Have each student chose one of the following diseases of the mid 1800's to research:
 - ◆ Dysentery
 - ◆ Measles
 - ◆ Influenza
 - ◆ Cholera
 - ◆ Scurvy
 - ◆ High infant mortality
 - ◆ Low life expectancy
6. After the students have chosen a disease of the mid 1800's to research they need to use the internet or other research materials to collect information about this disease. Some questions for the students to possibly answer: Who did this disease effect? How serious was the disease? How high of a chance was death with the disease? How deadly was the disease? How could the disease have been prevented? Does this disease still exist today?



7. The students need to compile their information and produce a one page word processed paper on their chosen disease.

Extensions:

Have the students view various [pictures/illustrations](#) of the Oregon Trail.

Assessment:

A grade will be given to the Disease paper using a class created rubric.



content page



Geology on the Trail

Lesson Length: 4 days

Objectives:

- The students will earn the Pathfinder “Rocks and Minerals” honor.
- The students will distinguish the differences in the three types of rocks.
- The students will discuss the possible types of rocks that the pioneers would have seen along their journey west.
- The students will create a simulated Independence Rock.
- The students will learn the importance of protecting state and federal parks.

Materials Needed:

- Samples of the following types of rocks:
 - igneous
 - sedimentary
 - metamorphic
- Magnifying glasses
- [Requirements for the Pathfinder Rocks and Minerals Honor](#)
- Large Balloons
- [PAPER MÂCHÉ](#) Recipe
- Newspaper/newsprint strips
- Permanent Markers
- Bluegrass/American Folk Music CD

Procedures:

1. The students will take on the role of a character from this time period and record their feelings as well as what was on their situational card and their response to it. Play the music softly while they are writing in their journals. (DAILY)
2. Review with the students the three basic types of rocks: igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic.



3. Provide each student with a magnifying glass to examine the various types of rocks.
4. Divide the rocks into three stations: Igneous, Sedimentary, and Metamorphic. Then have the students work three groups to examine the rocks.
5. Collect all the rocks.
6. Randomly divide the rocks into three stations, allowing the students to work in groups to identify each rock as igneous, sedimentary, or metamorphic.
7. The students will define the terms in the Pathfinder Rocks and Minerals honor.
8. Discuss with the students what Independence Rock is. A website to refer to is: <http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinmich/IndyRock.html>
9. The students will work together as a class to create a simulated paper mache "Independence Rock". After the "rock" has dried, the students may sign the rock and write a personal message. This is a good opportunity to remind the students that several of the rocks that they pioneers wrote on have been protected by the Federal and State parks. Also, remind the students that today, it is unacceptable to write on rocks as it can be viewed as graffiti and vandalism.

Assessment:

The students will take a rock and minerals test. In order to earn their Pathfinder honor they will have to pass the test.

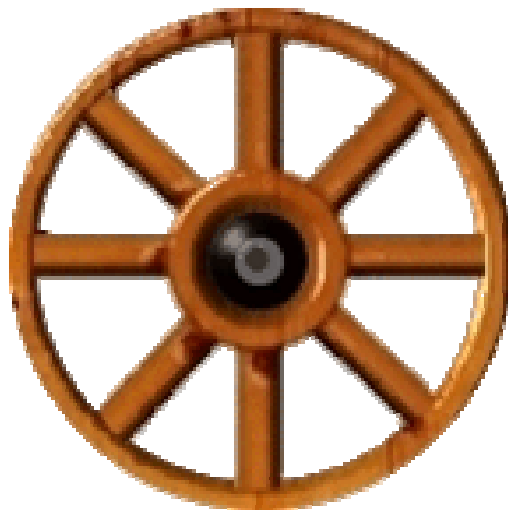


Pathfinder's Rock and Mineral Honor



Part 3

Arriving in Oregon (Unit Wrap-Up)



Lessons

Arriving In Oregon

Lesson Length: 1-2 class periods

Objectives:

- The students will identify with a character that traveled on the Oregon Trail through journaling.
- The students will keep an accurate ledger of their travel expenses.
- The students will follow a recipe and prepare pioneer recipes.
- The students will empathize with the pioneers traveling the Oregon Trail through reading segments of diaries and memoirs.

Resources/Materials Needed:

- Journal
- Student Trail Ledger Sheet
- Bluegrass/American Folk Music CD
- [Pioneer](#) and [Indian](#) Recipes
- [Diaries of Pioneers](#) (see next page for links)

Procedures:

1. Give the students their original Oregon Trail Budget. Have the budget attached to the [Travel the Trail Ledger Sheet](#), as well as a situational card. The students will need to mark any cost of trades or purchases on their Ledger Sheet.
2. The students will take on the role of a character from this time period and record their feelings as well as what was on their situational card and their response to it. Play the music softly while they are writing in their journals. (DAILY)
3. Read aloud to the students excerpts from Diaries of Pioneers that traveled along the Oregon Trail.



4. Discuss with students what they have learned over the course of this unit. Ask them, “If they were given the opportunity to travel the Oregon Trail back in the 1800’s, with all the information that they have gathered, would they move to Oregon?”

6. Have the students plan a “Welcome to Oregon” party. At the party have the students prepare the recipes (either at home or at the school depending on the teacher’s discretion).

Assessment:

- ◆ Grade students on completed Journals.
- ◆ Assign students a grade for corrected labeled maps.
- ◆ Assign students a grade for Budget Sheet and Ledger Sheet.
- ◆ Assign students a grade for party planned and recipes made. (participation points are recommended)

Websites for Pioneer Diaries

<http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinemich/00.n.dairies.html>

<http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinemich/00.n.memoirs.html>



Resources

Westward Ho! General Store

<http://www.cyberbee.com/wwho/store.html>

The Oregon Trail

<http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0210182/index.shtml>

Oregon Trail Budget

http://www.beacon-christian.org/Oregon_Trail_Budget.xls

Oregon Trail Ledger Sheet

http://www.beacon-christian.org/Oregon_Trail_Supply_Ledger.xls

Paper Mache Recipe

<http://www.recipegoldmine.com/childsticky/childsticky5.html>

The Oregon Trail

<http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrinmich/Oregontrail.html>

Across The Plains in '64

<http://flag.blackened.net/daver/1sthand/atp/atp.html>

Diaries, Memoirs, Letters and Reports Along The Trails West

<http://www.over-land.com/diaries.html>

Historical Gazette, Volume Two Number One: Emigrant Wagons Roll Westward

<http://www.aracnet.com/~histgaz/hgv2n1.htm>

Preparation & Organization Steps :For Traveling on the Oregon Trail with Westward Ho!

<http://www.beacon-christian.org/PreparationandOrganizationStepsforWestwardHo.doc>

Oregon Trail Lesson Plan on Maps

<http://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-2929.html>

Whitman Mission National Historic Site on the Web: Student Report Resources

<http://www.nps.gov/whmi/student.htm>

Whitman Mission National Historic Site: Oregon Trail Teacher's Guide

<http://www.nps.gov/whmi/educate/ortrtg/ortrtg.htm#ortrtc>



Ask Eric Lesson Plans: Oregon Trail Diary

http://askeric.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Social_Studies/US_History/USH0016.html

Ask Eric Lesson Plans: Simulation: Oregon Trail

http://askeric.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Social_Studies/US_History/USH0025.html

Oregon Trail Illustrations

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/OREGON/illus.html>

In Search of the Oregon Trail

<http://www.pbs.org/opb/oregontrail/>

Pathfinders Rock and Minerals Honor Requirements

http://www.pathfinders.nadadventist.org/honors/requirements/nature/rocks_minerals.htm

Whitman Mission National Historic Site on the Web

Literature Connection

<http://www.nps.gov/whmi/educate/ortrtg/8or3.htm>

The American Nation

Prentice Hall 1995

http://www.phschool.com/atschool/TAN/Survey/Teacher_Area/TAN1_T_BK_index.html

