

The Pioneer Spirit

Wagon Trains and the Oregon Trail

Teacher's Guide



Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

The Pioneer Spirit: Wagon Trains and the Oregon Trail—In spite of dangers involved in taking a 2,000-mile journey through the wilderness, more than 5,000 pioneers traveled the Oregon Trail within a three-year period during the 1840s. This program explores the allure of the West by investigating the richness of the fur-trading industry and the discovery of a successful land route from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean. *The Pioneer Spirit: Wagon Trains and the Oregon Trail* also introduces viewers to the Native American tribes that occupied the Western territories, the mountain men who lived among them, and the pioneer families who risked everything to travel across the untamed country in a covered wagon.

Discussion Questions

- How did various treaties affect American expansion?
 - Who were the mountain men?
 - What were the reasons “Oregon fever” swept the nation in 1843?
 - What hardships did travelers endure along the Oregon Trail?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Understand what motivated people to migrate to the American West.
- Learn about the challenges facing those who traveled along the Oregon Trail.
- Write a journal about one traveler’s adventures on the Oregon Trail.

Materials

- *The Pioneer Spirit: Wagon Trains and the Oregon Trail* video
- Computer with Internet access
- Print resources about daily life and survival along the Oregon Trail

Procedures

1. Review with students the treaties that affected American expansion. What was the Northwest Passage? How did the Treaty of 1818 affect the settlement of Oregon Country? What other treaties paved the way for westward expansion? Discuss examples from the video, such as the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and the Florida Purchase Treaty of 1813. Which countries were involved in these treaties? What was the great compromise of the Oregon Treaty of 1846? Who was president at the time?
2. Review what motivated people to travel to Oregon Country. Who were the first residents of Oregon Country? Who were the mountain men? Where did they come from? How did the mountain men sustain themselves while living in the wilderness? How did they interact with the Native American tribes already living in the Western territories? What were some of the reasons "Oregon fever" swept the nation in 1843? Discuss examples from the video, such as the economic depression of 1837 that drove down agricultural prices in the Mississippi Valley. Describe encounters between the missionaries and Native American tribes.
3. Ask students to list hardships that early pioneers faced. Encourage them to think of challenges not mentioned in the video. Record their responses. Your list might include the following:
 - becoming lost or stranded in the wilderness
 - disease
 - lack of food
 - long stretches of traveling without any water
 - dangerous river crossings
 - attacks from Native American tribes
 - harsh weather conditions
 - attacks from wild animals
 - running out of materials to barter with at the trading posts
4. Have students use print and Web resources to research daily life on the Oregon Trail. The following Web sites are good starting points:
 - The Oregon Trail
<http://www.oregon-trail.com/>
 - End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center
<http://www.endoftheoregontrail.org/histhome.html>
 - Official Web Site of the National Oregon/California Trail Center
<http://www.oregontrailcenter.org/>
 - The Oregon Trail
<http://www.americanwest.com/trails/pages/oretrail.htm>

- National Park Service: Oregon Trail
<http://www.nps.gov/oreg/>
 - The Oregon Trail: 1843 Map
<http://www.historyglobe.com/ot/otmap1.htm>
5. When students have completed their initial research, ask them to compose at least three handwritten journal entries from the point of view of a traveler on the Oregon Trail. Ask students to imagine what it must have been like to travel for several months with limited food supplies and inadequate shelter from the harsh weather. What sorts of obstacles did these travelers encounter and how did they overcome them? Encourage students to include illustrations of unusual sights that pioneers might have encountered on the Oregon Trail.
6. Have the students choose a partner. Ask them to share their journals with their partners and answer any questions. Then have each student summarize his or her partner's project for the class, including at least three interesting facts.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were highly engaged in class discussions; produced a complete project, including all of the requested information; accurately summarized their partner's project and cited three interesting, relevant points.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; produced an adequate project, including most of the requested information; satisfactorily summarized their partner's project and cited two relevant points.
- 1 point: Students participated minimally in class discussions; created an incomplete project with little or none of the requested information; were not able to summarize their partner's project or recall any interesting, relevant points.

Vocabulary

barter

Definition: To trade one thing for another without the use of money

Context: At the frontier trading posts, people bartered beaver pelts and other items for the supplies they needed.

emigrant

Definition: A person who leaves one country or region to settle in another

Context: The emigrants who followed the Oregon Trail eventually settled in parts of Oregon, Washington, California, Utah, Colorado, and Montana.

expansionist

Definition: One who supports a nation's policy of territorial or economic expansion



Context: The American expansionists made “54-40 or fight” their rallying cry during the presidential election of 1844.

Louisiana Purchase

Definition: A territory of the western United States extending from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains between the Gulf of Mexico and the Canadian border

Context: In 1803, the United States obtained the territory known as the Louisiana Purchase from France for the sum of \$15 million.

missionary

Definition: One sent to spread religious faith among unbelievers or to engage in charitable work with religious support

Context: The missionaries who explored the West during the early 19th century were part of a religious movement known as the Second Great Awakening.

mountain men

Definition: Rugged individualist fur trappers who preferred to live apart from society

Context: The mountain men of the Pacific Northwest learned to coexist with the local Native American tribes.

passage

Definition: A road, path, channel, or course by which something can pass

Context: Native American tribes helped the early pioneers find a safe passage to the Pacific Northwest.

pioneer

Definition: One of the first to settle in an area

Context: The pioneers left behind their homes and many of their worldly possessions to seek a new life in Oregon Country.

treaty

Definition: A formal agreement between two or more states or nations

Context: The Oregon Treaty of 1846 divided the Oregon Country between Britain and the United States at the 49th parallel.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:



- United States History – Expansion and Reform: Understands the United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans
- Geography – The World in Spatial Terms: Knows the location of places, geographic features, and patterns of the environment
- Geography – Places and Regions: Understands the concept of regions
- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the process, patterns, and functions of human settlement
- Geography – Uses of Geography: Understands how geography is used to interpret the past
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the DiscoverySchool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>.

Credit

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