



# Pioneers

## Suggested Pre-visit Activities

These activities are tied into the Missouri, Illinois, and national standards for Social Studies and Language Arts.



## Lesson Overview

Students will learn how the pioneers of the 19th century planned and prepared for the great task of overland travel to the west.

## Objectives

Students who participate in this activity(ies) will be able to:

- Discuss the reasons nineteenth century pioneers were drawn to the Oregon Territory
- Understand the emotions associated with leaving one place and moving another
- Understand the planning involved in moving and/or traveling
- List and describe the importance of necessary supplies and provisions needed for a 19th century overland journey

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## Historical Background

During the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, the lure of the western frontier attracted many groups of people. Even before railroads linked the American West with the East, hundreds of thousands of pioneers traveled across the great continent to claim, work, and settle the land. These emigrants, or “overlanders” as they came to be called, helped to create America’s pioneering spirit. Historians estimate that over 300,000 people moved west across the Oregon, California and Mormon Trails. Of that number, approximately 40,000 were children. It was possible to reach the Western coast by sailing around Cape Horn of Africa and some travelers did choose this more costly option. Yet, it is the image of the pioneer’s covered wagon heading westward that is planted in our collective historic memory.

Following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, western explorers and fur traders laid claim to the northwest Oregon country. In 1836, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, along with Henry and Eliza Spalding, headed for Oregon as missionaries to spread Christianity to the American Indians. Proving it was possible for women and families to travel overland to Oregon, their trip opened the door for mass settlement. By 1843, over 1,000 pioneers had crossed what would be called the Oregon Trail. Many more followed in the years to come.

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 led to a new wave of travelers in 1849. Known as “forty-niners,” these emigrants followed much of the Oregon Trail and later turned south on the California Trail. Settlement came rapidly to California. By 1850 it had become the thirty-first state in the Union.

Another pioneer trail to the West was the Mormon Trail. Religious persecution forced the Mormons to leave Nauvoo, Illinois in 1846. Seeking religious freedom in a new land, thousands of Mormon families traveled along this route to the Great Salt Lake, in present-day Utah, during the period 1846-1869.

In the early days of the trail, many overlanders used guides who knew the way. Later on, as the trail became well worn, a guide was no longer necessary. Guide books were written that provided important information for the travelers. Many of the people who went west feared attacks by American Indians. In reality, there were very few such incidents and many pioneers experienced positive contact with Indians. Accidents and disease along the trail turned out to be the real enemies.

Gradually, travel to the West became easier and took less time. In 1869, the railroads linked the nation from one end to the other. The pioneer overland trails never completely faded away. Parts of them became the nation’s roads and highways. Today, these pioneer trail routes and the overlanders’ history associated with them are preserved for future generations. Many national park sites, like Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, preserve and commemorate the pioneers’ daily life on the journey west.

Your museum education program will focus primarily on the lifestyles of the pioneer families who prepared to go overland on the Oregon Trail, seeking a better life and new opportunities. From the trail’s starting point in Independence, Missouri, it was over 2,000 miles to the Willamette Valley in Oregon.

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## Vocabulary

*canvas* – a strong cloth of hemp, flax, or cotton that is used for making tents and sails, and the material on which oil paintings are made

*cholera* – a dangerous infectious disease in which violent vomiting and diarrhea are present

*churn* – a container in which milk or cream is stirred or shaken to make butter.

*emigrant* - a person who leaves one region to settle in another

*environment* - the conditions that surround a person, animal, or plant and affect its growth, actions, and character

*frontier* - the part of a settled country that lies next to a region that is still unsettled

*Independence, Missouri* - Located near Kansas City, Missouri, this city is considered the beginning of the Oregon Trail

*luxury* – something pleasant but not really needed for one’s pleasure or comfort

*migration* – the act of moving from one region or country to another

*missionary* – a person sent by a church into an area to promote their religion

*necessity* – something needed to be had or done

*oxen* - common domestic cattle used especially for hauling loads

*pioneer* - a person who goes into unknown areas, opening up the way for others to follow, as an early settler or scientist doing original work

*plateau* – a broad flat area of high land

*prairie* - another word for the plains; a flat, level, and grassy country with few hills, trees or mountains

*propaganda* – an organized spreading of ideas to promote a cause

*provisions* - supplies or materials

*replica* – a very exact copy

*settler* - a person who makes a permanent home in a place

*tallow* – a white solid fat obtained from fatty tissues of cattle and sheep and used to make soap and candle

*toll* – a tax paid for a privilege (such as the use of a highway or bridge)

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## Suggested Activity

Going on a trip requires planning. Ask students to think back to a time when they were going to spend a day or a week away from home. Maybe some students in your class remember a move to a new house or to a new city or state. Start a conversation among students about the times they've had to plan and pack for a trip or move. The questions below will help you start a dialogue with students.

How do you feel when you know you will be going on a trip?

What are some of the first things you do to get ready?

What are some of the items you take with you?

What was your favorite trip?

Has anyone here ever moved from one home to another?

How did you feel about moving?

What can you tell us about the move?

Was there anything you had to leave behind?

Below is a list of personal and household items, tools and equipment that would have been found in a nineteenth century family's home. They could not take it all, only the necessities. Make copies of the list and as individuals or in small groups, have students mark items either N for necessity or L for luxury. If they mark it as a necessity have them briefly explain why. Make copies of the chart on the next page to help students organize their thoughts.

Oxen	Butter
Milk cow	Sugar
Horse	Dried fruit
Blankets	Pickles
Mattress	Rifle
Coffee pot	Knife
Stove	Hand tools
Flour	Nails
Bacon	Lumber
Bread	Toy wagon
Beans	Doll
Toy rocking horse	China dishes
Toy soldiers	Pet dog
Seeds	Clothes
Plow	Tent
Dresser	Rocking chair

Item	Necessity or Luxury?	How would it be used?
Oxen		
Milk cow		
Horse		
Blankets		
Mattress		
Coffee pot		
Stove		
Flour		
Bacon		
Bread		
Beans		
Toy rocking horse		
Toy soldiers		
Seeds		
Plow		
Dresser		

<b>Item</b>	<b>Necessity or Luxury?</b>	<b>How would it be used?</b>
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Pet dog		
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Tent		
Rocking Chair		

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## Reference for Supply Worksheet Activity

**Oxen** - They were the preferred animals for pulling a covered wagon. Unlike horses, the only food they needed was the grass they ate along the trail. They were stronger than horses.

**Milk cow.** Many families took their cows along with them so they would have a source of milk and butter as they traveled.

**Riding horse** - Horses were always part of a wagon train. Several men were appointed to ride along the string of wagons to keep things moving and in order.

**Blankets** - They were a must for keeping warm at night and for wrapping delicate items in the wagon.

**A Bed** - Wooden bed frames were probably left behind. Beds on the trail were fashioned out of tarps and blankets. Families either slept in a tent or under their wagon for protection from the weather.

**Coffee pot** - Much like today's homes, it was rare to find a family on the trail without a coffee pot.

**Stove** - Many started out with a shiny black cast iron stove loaded on the wagon, but along the way its weight became a burden. When the load needed lightened, the stove was often the first to go.

**Flour** - Flour was a necessity and a main ingredient for much of their food.

**Bacon** - Bacon was a necessity, it provided protein and flavor to otherwise bland food. Because it was salted and dried it did not need refrigeration.

**Bread** - Bread was not taken, it was made along the way.

**Beans** - Definitely a necessity, dry beans were easy to prepare, they were very filling and full of protein.

**Toy rocking horse** - Likely a rocking horse would be left behind because of its size.

**Toy soldiers** - Toy soldiers may have been allowed because they were small enough to pack or even carry in a pocket.

**Seeds** - A small variety of seeds may have been taken for planting at your new homestead. However, farming supplies could be purchased in Oregon and/or California.

**Plow** - A plow would not have been an easy item to pack in a wagon and could be purchased once you reached Oregon.

**Dresser** - Probably not an item that would have been packed because of its size and weight. Furniture in general was too bulky to pack.

**Butter** - Butter would have been made from cow's milk as needed along the way.

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**Sugar** - Sugar was a necessity. It provided flavor for food and energy to tired bodies.

**Dried fruit** - Dried fruit and/or vegetables provided much needed vitamin C for the pioneer families.

**Pickles** - Pickles were carried as another source of Vitamin C.

**Rifle** - Rifles were a necessity, and were used for protection and hunting.

**Knife** - Knives were a necessity and could be used in many situations.

**Hand tools** - Small carpentry tools were also needed for many different situations.

**Nails** - Nails were taken along, mainly to repair the wagon as needed.

**Lumber** - Small spare pieces of lumber were carried to replace broken wagon parts

**Toy wagon** - The size and weight of a toy wagon usually kept it from being brought along.

**Doll** - These were precious companions for many young girls on the trail and could be carried throughout the journey

**Mother's china dishes** - This was one cherished item that most women would not leave behind. Some diaries state that the fine china was packed in the flour barrel for safe keeping .

**Pet dog** - Dogs were usually a welcome companion and were relied on to keep watch.

**Clothes** - At least two changes of clothes were recommended. Wash day only occurred when a good camp spot was found.

**Tent** - A tent was carried to sleep under in bad weather. Sometimes the tent served as a temporary "home" at the end of the trail, until a more permanent structure could be built.

**Rocking chair** - As a piece of furniture, it was too heavy and awkward to carry.

**Family photos** - Photos were packed as a reminder of the family left behind.

**Books** - Too many books weighed down the wagon, but most families packed a Bible and lesson books so children could continue their education along the trail.

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## Extension Activities

Western Oregon was called the “promised land” for a variety of reasons. The climate was mild, the land fertile and the growing season long. Have students explore the agriculture, landscape and climate of Oregon and compare it to the Midwest.

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Tape an outline of a wagon box on the floor. (Prairie Schooners or farm wagons were 10-12 feet long, 3-4 feet wide, and 2-3 feet deep.) The outline would give students an idea of how little space the pioneers had in their wagon.

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*“They say that out in Oregon the pigs are running around under great acorn trees, round and fat, and already cooked, with knives and forks sticking in them so that you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry.”*

Exaggerations like these were told by businessmen, entrepreneurs, and even government officials eager for the settlement of the West. These tall tales played right into the hopes and dreams of hundreds of thousands of Americans wanting to better their condition. Reread the quote above to your students and have them create an illustration based on their images.

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The pioneers were extremely limited in the types of food they could carry on their journey. Needless to say their diets were unbalanced. Meat, milk and fresh produce were rare. Have students investigate these foods and discover why they are an important part of a balanced diet. What specific nourishment do they provide for our bodies?

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Many pioneers made room in the wagon for their musical instruments. Others made music with whatever was available. Music helped the weary travelers relax and pass the time. Have students design and make an instrument using inexpensive classroom and household objects. Students may be familiar with some nineteenth century trail songs such as *Red River Valley*, *Oh Susannah*, and *Sweet Betsy From Pike*.

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## Younger Students

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Stevens, Carla. Trouble for Lucy. New York, NY: Clarion Books, 1979.

## Older Students and Adults

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Unruh, John D. The Plains Across. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1979.

Werner, Emmy E. Pioneer Children on the Journey West. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1995.

## Websites

[www.endoftheoregontrail.org](http://www.endoftheoregontrail.org)

[www.isu.edu/~trinmich/allabout](http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/allabout)

[www.oregontrail.blm.gov](http://www.oregontrail.blm.gov)

