



Travelers and Transportation on the National Road

It has been estimated that 200,000 people used the National Road every year during its heyday in the 1830s and 1840s. People traveled east and west on the road using several modes of transportation.

One of the most common vehicles on the road was the Conestoga wagon. These wagons were used to move freight. Men who made their living driving these wagons were called wagoners. The Conestoga wagons averaged 17 to 19 feet in length (22 feet in length including a canvas bonnet), 11 feet in height, and weighed about 3,500 pounds. The average load weighed 6,000 pounds. Sometimes loads as heavy as 10,000 pounds were hauled. The wagons were generally pulled by six large draft horses. Going east the wagons normally carried farm products such as bacon, tobacco, flour, corn, oats, wool, lard, and cheese. Heading west the Conestoga wagons might be loaded with manufactured goods like cloth, china, utensils, and jewelry; or food items including salt, sugar, coffee, and tea. The wagons were generally painted bright blue with red trim and white canvas coverings. The wagoners would either walk next to the wagon; ride on the rearmost, left horse; or sit on a board that slid out from the bottom of the wagon, called a lazy board. Horses were sometimes decorated with sets of bells, three to five bells per horse. These bells hung in an arch over the horses' collars and jingled as the horses walked.

People who could afford the expense might travel the National Road in a stagecoach. It cost a lot to ride the stagecoach, so most of the passengers had important business to accomplish or were "well-to-do." Many stagecoach lines serviced the National Road—the Good Intent Stage Line, the June Bug Line, and the National

Road Stage Company—to name a few. The stagecoaches were painted bright colors and decorated with murals to attract customers in the competitive business. The stagecoach carried nine passengers inside—three people each on three benches—and one passenger outside next to the driver. The stagecoaches were pulled by four horses and went 6 to 10 miles per hour. This was the fastest means of land transportation. This speed was achieved by changing the horses every 12 to 15 miles or about every 2 hours. The horses were expected to run the entire time they pulled the stagecoach.

The stagecoaches gave a very bumpy ride. One woman wrote that the passengers tried very hard "to prevent our heads coming in contact with the roof of the carriage." Mrs. Mary Eastman wrote, "The lady with us... would bound from side to side with such force, her husband was obligated to hold her." However, often the passengers were packed in too tightly to bounce back and forth. They were surrounded by strangers. The stagecoach's open windows had canvas or leather window shades. Even with the shade's protection passengers got wet when it rained and dusty when it was dry. Cold weather could leave the travelers shivering. One man equipped himself with a buffalo robe before beginning the journey. He wrote that the tavern stops "were like angel's visits." Generally passengers rode the stagecoach for at least 12 to 14 hours per day. They endured all the discomforts of stagecoach travel for the speed it provided.



Travelers and Transportation on the National Road

Some stagecoaches also carried the mail along with their passengers. Mail stagecoaches had the right of way on the National Road, and they claimed this right by blowing a coachman's horn to warn other travelers to move to the side. Mail stagecoaches did not have to pay tolls.

Heavy clouds of dust would often signal the approach of a huge herd of animals being driven to market on the National Road. Drovers, the people who tended the animals, moved herds of sheep, pigs, cows, and mules. Once they reached eastern cities such as Baltimore, Maryland, or Washington, D.C., the animals would be sold and the drover would turn around and go home. These animals "out numbered and out ate" all the other users of the road. One person noted the line of livestock was so long it "was almost endless."

The number of Conestoga wagons heading west was much larger than the number heading in the opposite direction. The extra wagons belonged to emigrants heading west to make a new home in Ohio, Indiana, or Illinois. The wagons were loaded with the families' possessions. Most people found it more comfortable to walk than to bump around in the seat-less wagon. Generally, only the very young and very old rode in the wagon.

Horsemen, private carriages, farm wagons, and numerous other types of vehicles joined the crowds traveling on the National Road.

With so much traffic it is not surprising that many kinds of people traveled the National Road. Famous politicians including John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, Millard Fillmore, William Harrison, Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, James Monroe, James K. Polk, Zachary Taylor, and Martin Van Buren traveled

along the road before, during, or after their political careers. Entertainers were common. The circus promoter P.T. Barnum, the renowned singer Jenny Lind, and the Revolutionary War hero General Lafayette also traveled the National Road.

An observer once counted 133 wagons, each pulled by six horses, that passed by him on the National Road in one day. And that did not include any wagons pulled by fewer than six horses. Another man reported seeing as many as 20 stagecoaches in a line. A third person recalled 100 mules, 1,000 hogs, and 1,000 cattle all feeding on corn after a day of walking on the National Road. The National Road was a very busy highway. The writer Thomas Searight summed it up well when he said, the National Road "looked more like the leading avenue of a great city than a road through rural districts."



Travelers and Transportation on the National Road

Additional Information

1. The following **Biography Cards** provide additional information:
 - Elizabeth Boeke
 - Redding Bunting
 - Mary Reed Eastman
 - Andrew Jackson
 - Westley Strother
 - Ellis B. Woodward
2. The following **Occupation Cards** provide additional information:
 - Emigrant
 - Farmer
 - Stagecoach Driver
 - Traveling Entertainment
 - Wagoner

Supplemental Activities

1. Using a cleared space in the classroom, measure and mark with chairs the dimensions of a Conestoga wagon (42 inches wide, 17 to 19 feet long). Discuss with the students what types of goods might be transported in the wagon. Next, have students suggest possessions a family might take with them when traveling west in a Conestoga.
2. Have students keep a journal of their own travels and activities.



Student Reading: Travelers and Transportation on the National Road

Materials

- Copies of the reproducible pages **Travelers and Transportation on the National Road**.

Objectives

After reading the student reading and answering the thought questions, students will be able to

- List three common methods of travel on the National Road.
- Describe how the Conestoga wagon and stagecoach operated.

Standards

Pennsylvania Standards for History

- 8.1.3 A
- 8.2.3 C

Pennsylvania Standards for Economics

- 6.4.3 G
- 6.5.3 B



Procedures

1. Make a copy of the reproducible pages for each student.
2. Have the students read and answer the thought questions.
3. Discuss the thought questions.

Thought Question Answers

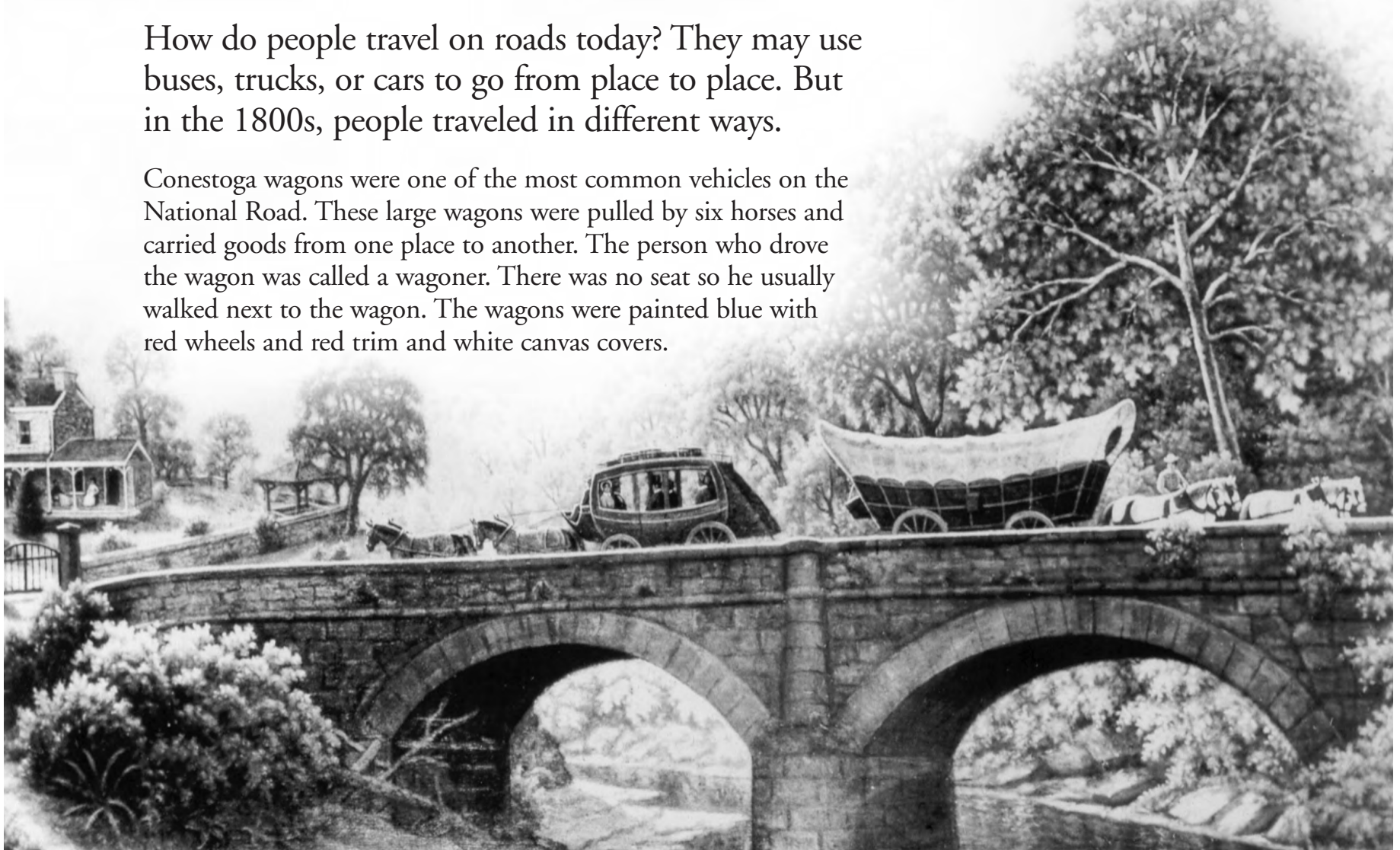
- Conestoga wagons are similar to tractor trailer trucks.
- Stagecoaches are similar to buses.



Travelers and Transportation on the National Road

How do people travel on roads today? They may use buses, trucks, or cars to go from place to place. But in the 1800s, people traveled in different ways.

Conestoga wagons were one of the most common vehicles on the National Road. These large wagons were pulled by six horses and carried goods from one place to another. The person who drove the wagon was called a wagoner. There was no seat so he usually walked next to the wagon. The wagons were painted blue with red wheels and red trim and white canvas covers.





Travelers and Transportation on the National Road

People rode in stagecoaches, which was the fastest way to travel on the National Road. Each stagecoach held 10 passengers and was pulled by four horses. The horses were expected to run the entire time. About every 2 hours the stagecoach stopped to get a new team of horses. This is what made the stagecoach so fast. It was expensive to ride on the stagecoach. The stagecoaches had names and were painted with bright scenes to attract customers. Some stagecoaches also carried the mail from one town to another.

Often, people who were moving to a new home on the frontier chose to travel on the National Road. These people were called emigrants. The emigrants had everything they wanted to bring to their new home in a wagon pulled by horses or oxen. Most of the time the whole family traveled together. The emigrants walked

all day next to the wagon and in the evening found a place to stay. The wagons moved slowly, and it took many days to reach the end of their journey.

Sometimes big clouds of dust could be seen moving along the National Road. The dust clouds were made by large herds of animals. The people who cared for the animals were called drovers. The drovers walked the animals to big cities where they were sold. Then the drovers turned around and went home. Herds of sheep, pigs, cows, mules, and turkeys were all seen walking on the National Road.

The National Road was very busy. Many people traveled along it. Some people were traveling for work, and some were traveling with their family. Some people were famous and many were not.



Thought Questions:

1. Conestoga wagons are similar to what vehicle we use today? _____
2. Stagecoaches are similar to what vehicle we use today? _____



Student Activity: Stagecoach and Conestoga Wagon Coloring Sheet

Materials

- Copies of the reproducible pages **Stagecoach and Conestoga Wagon Coloring Sheet**.
- Crayons

Objectives

After completing the student activity, the students will be able to

- Color a stagecoach and Conestoga wagon so that they look as they would have when they traveled the National Road.

Standards

Pennsylvania Standards for History

- 8.2.3 B



Procedures

1. Make a copy of the reproducible pages for each student.
2. Have the students color.

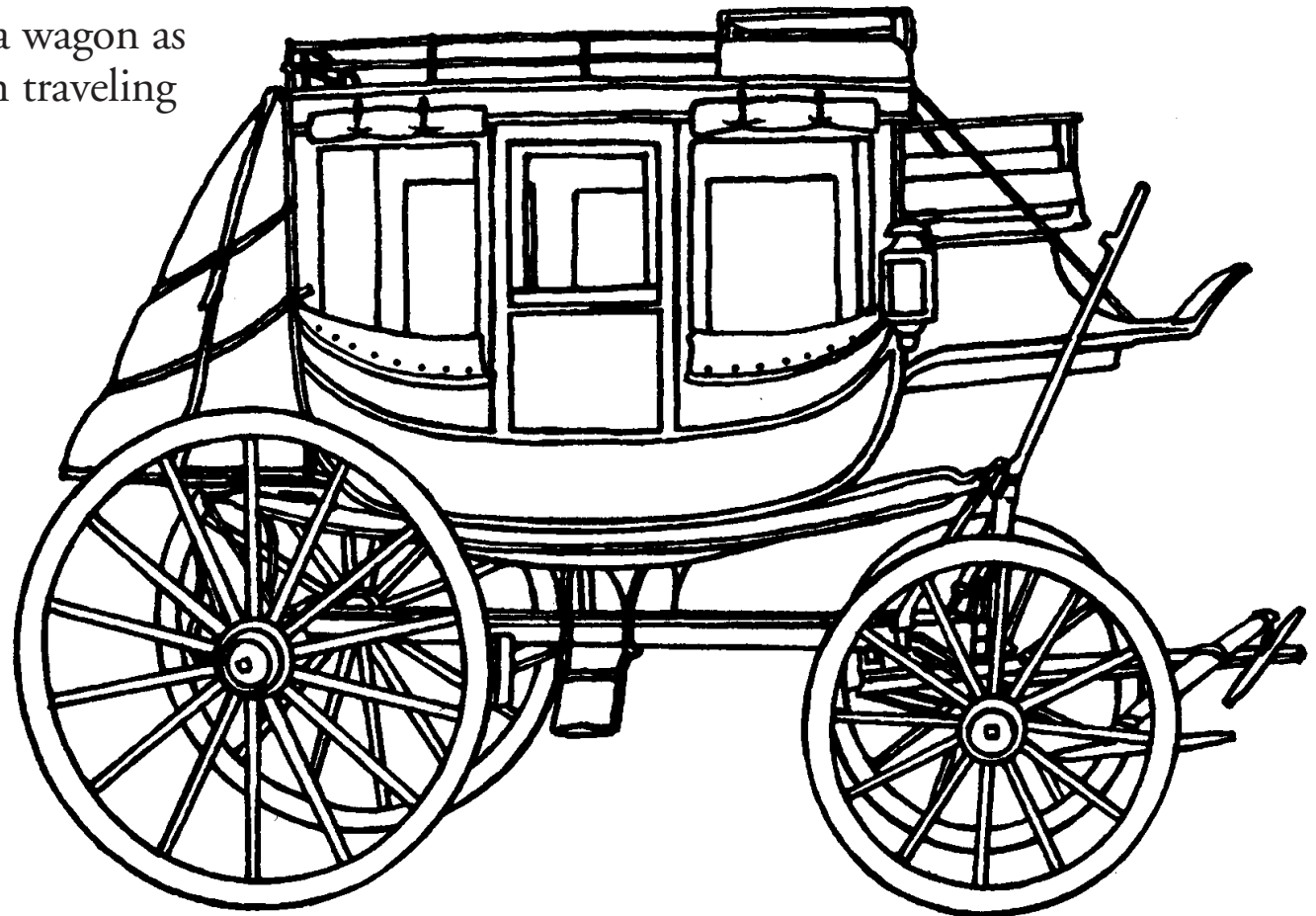
Activity Answers

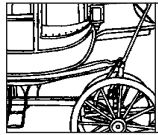
- **Stagecoach:** painted with bright colors and murals, the stagecoach's name was also put on the stagecoach.
- **Conestoga wagon:** blue body, red trim, red wheels, and white or cream covering.



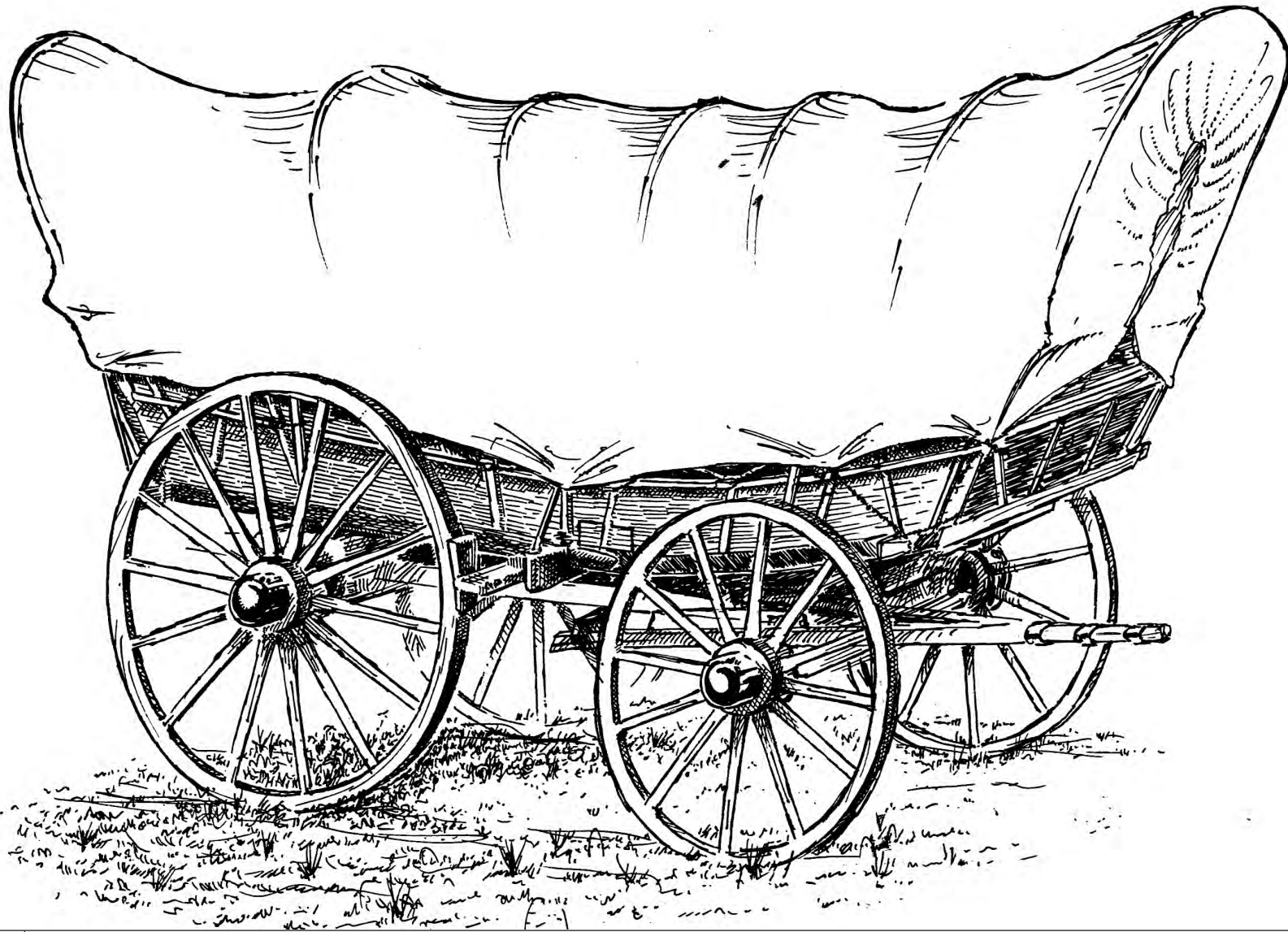
Stagecoach and Conestoga Wagon Coloring Sheet

Directions: Use the student reading to find information about how stagecoaches and Conestoga wagons were painted. Color the stagecoach and the Conestoga wagon as they would have looked when traveling the National Road.





Stagecoach and Conestoga Wagon Coloring Sheet





Student Activity: Travelers' Tools

Materials

- Copies of the reproducible pages **Travelers' Tools**.

Objectives

After completing the student activity, the students will be able to

- Describe three travelers' tools and list whether they were used on a stagecoach or Conestoga wagon.

Standards

Pennsylvania Standards for History

- 8.1.3 B
- 8.2.3 C



Procedures

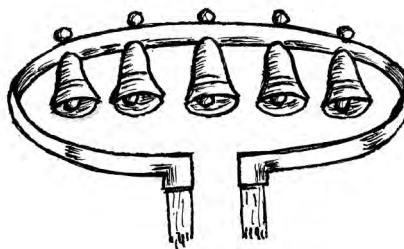
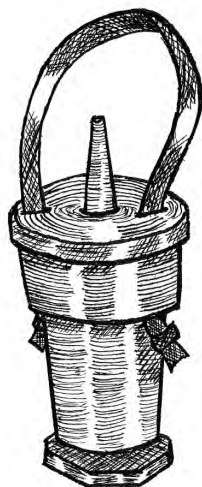
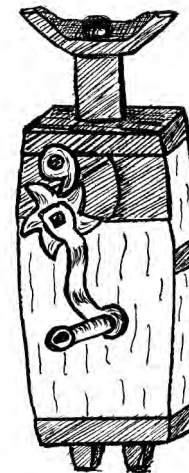
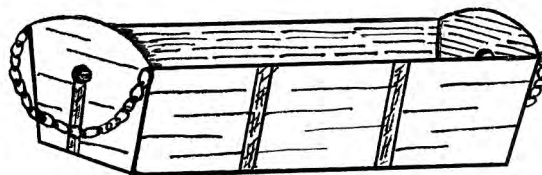
1. Copy reproducible pages for each student.
2. Have the students follow the directions and write the object names in.

Activity Answers

- Hame bells, Conestoga; Feed box, Conestoga; Carpet bags, stagecoach; Wagon jack, Conestoga; Coachman's horn, stagecoach; Tar bucket, Conestoga.



Travelers' Tools





Travelers' Tools

Directions:

1. Write the name of each of the objects under its picture. Use the Travelers' Tools Glossary for help.
2. Write a "C" next to the object if it was used in a Conestoga wagon or an "S" next to it if it was used on a stagecoach.

Hame bells	Feed box	Carpet bags
Wagon jack	Coachman's horn	Tar bucket



Travelers' Tools Glossary

Carpet bag: A bag made from carpet or rug used by travelers on stagecoaches to carry clothes and belongings.

Coachman's horn: A long horn, used to announce the arrival of a stagecoach at a tavern. These were also used on stagecoaches to warn other travelers to let the stagecoach pass.

Feed box: A long wooden box used to feed horses. These were carried hanging off the back of Conestoga wagons.

Hame bells: Sets of bells hung on an arch over each Conestoga horse's collar.

Tar bucket: A wooden or leather pot with a cover used to store the tar needed for greasing Conestoga wagon axles. These pots also held the wooden paddle used to apply the tar.

Wagon jack: A tool used to lift the frame of a Conestoga wagon in order to repair or replace a wheel.



Student Reading: Emigrant's Journal

Materials

- Copies of the reproducible pages **Emigrant's Journal**.

Objectives

After completing the student activity, the students will be able to

- Describe a typical day for an emigrant.
- List two hardships the emigrants encountered

Standards

Pennsylvania Standards for History

- 8.1.3 A
- 8.2.3 C

Pennsylvania Standards for Economics

- 6.3.3 B
- 6.4.3 G



Procedures

1. Make a copy of the reproducible pages for each student.
2. Have the students read the **Emigrant's Journal**.
3. Discuss the thought questions.

Thought Question Answers

- Moving vans are used today; it takes much shorter time now; and it is more comfortable today. Travelers don't have to walk today. Now there are fast food restaurants and hotels.
- People still need to pack, eat, and stop to sleep at night. Vehicles still break and need to be repaired. People still encounter bad weather and see beautiful scenery. There are still road signs along the road.



Emigrant's Journal

Many families used the National Road to travel to the frontier to a new home. These people were called emigrants. Below is a make-believe journal that shows what it may have been like for a child to travel the National Road with a wagon.

Directions: Read the journal and then answer the Thought Questions.

June 10, 1835

Tomorrow we finally start our trip west to our new home in Ohio. Uncle George moved there last year and has written to father about how wonderful it is. There are many farms for sale. We will live with him until we buy a farm of our own. Father hired a wagon and a driver. Everything has been packed into the wagon—our furniture, our clothes, our sheets and blankets, our tools, our pots and pans, and everything else we will need in our new home. It will be sad to leave here, but I think father is right and we will have a good life in Ohio.



June 11, 1835

I was very excited when we started this morning. It took us most of the day to reach the National Road. At first I rode in the wagon, but it was very bumpy. I liked walking better. This evening we stopped at a tavern in Clear Spring for a meal and to sleep.

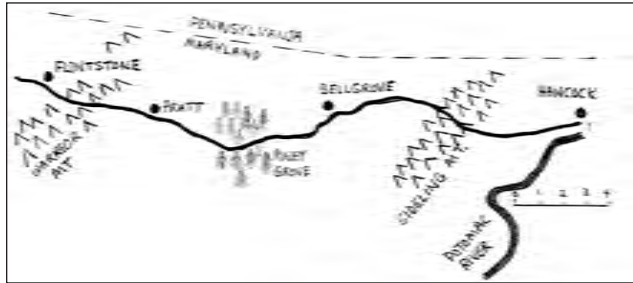


June 12, 1835

Before we left we got bread and milk to eat during the day. The older children and I walked along side the wagon. Mother told me to watch my younger sister and brother. Twice a day the driver puts tar on the wagon axles. The tar greases the axles and lets the wheels move easily. We stopped at a tavern at Hancock for the night.

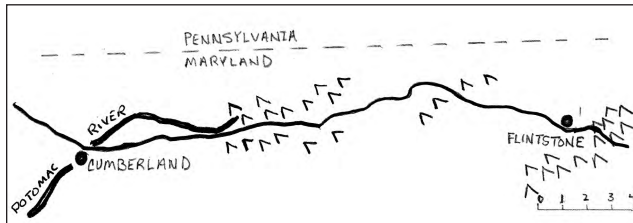


Emigrant's Journal



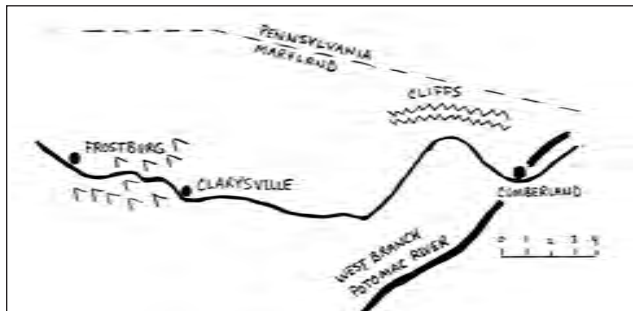
June 13, 1835

This afternoon we had a very heavy rain and thunder cracked all around us. The wagon got stuck in the mud. We walked to a tavern near Flintstone for the night. In the morning father will get extra horses to pull the wagon out of the mud.



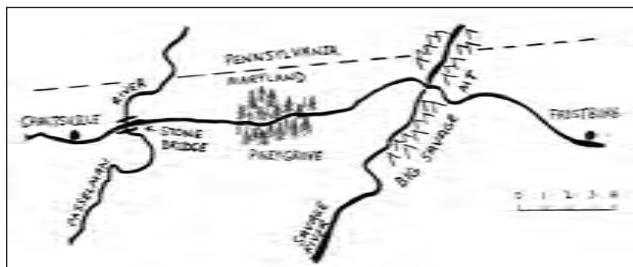
June 14, 1835

It took a long time to free the wagon. Everyone is tired and grumpy. We all wish we were in Ohio. Made it to Cumberland today.



June 15, 1835

Today we started up the mountains on the other side of Cumberland. But oh! how beautiful the mountains and valleys are with the thick forests and wide streams. It was indeed a dangerous and long day as we traveled over high mountains. Stayed at Frostburg.

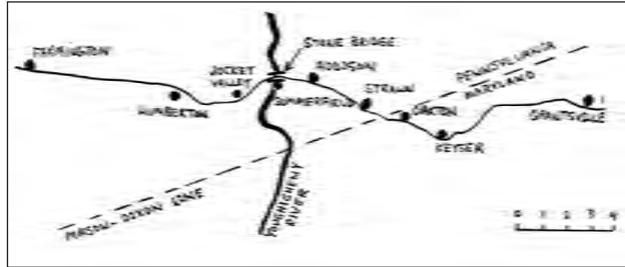


June 16, 1835

The mile marker said 120 miles to Wheeling. It seems so far away! We saw a 4-foot rattlesnake on the road. It scared the horses. We are lucky the wagon did not tip. Stopped at Grantsville.

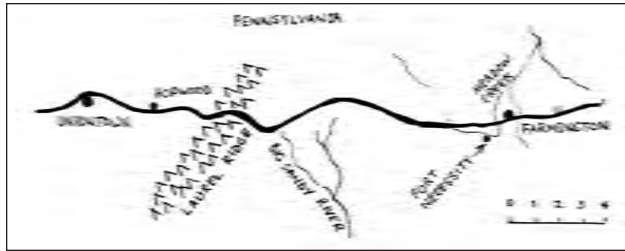


Emigrant's Journal



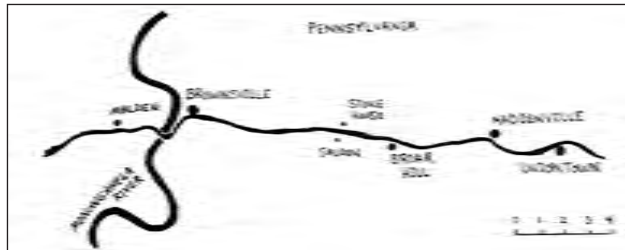
June 17, 1835

A long, hard day. I was feeling ill and rode in the wagon. Hours of up and down, sideways, and bouncing made me very sore. Made it to Farmington.



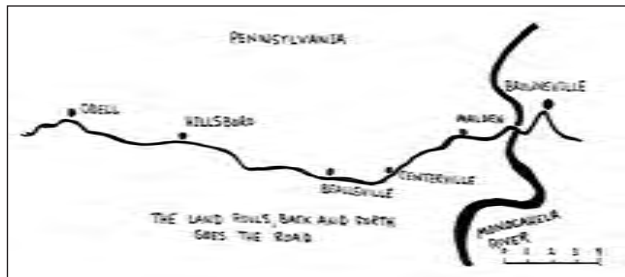
June 18, 1835

We passed a huge herd of pigs today. It seemed endless. The drovers are walking them to Baltimore. Even though we are surrounded by forests and mountains and in the most rural country, the National Road is very busy. Stagecoaches and Conestoga wagons are on the road all day. We got to Uniontown before dark. We had the best meal.



June 19, 1835

This morning we were late starting. The wagon and harness needed repairing. Stopped at a tavern in Brownsville. This is quite a large town and very busy.

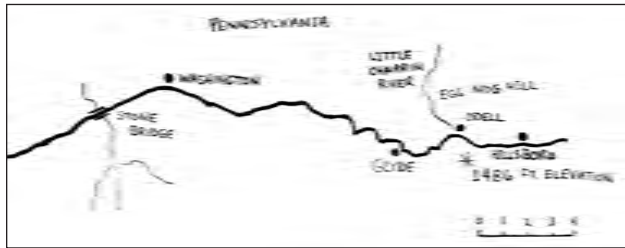


June 20, 1835

This morning we crossed the famous Iron Bridge and then we crossed the Monongahela River on a wooden bridge. We have crossed many beautiful stone bridges on the National Road. Stopped at Hillsboro.

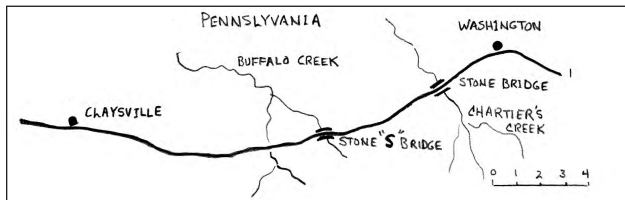


Emigrant's Journal



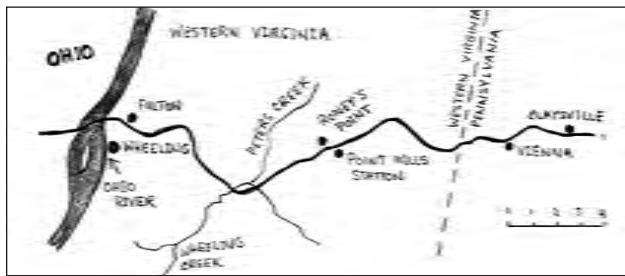
June 21, 1835

We couldn't get bread and milk this morning like we generally do. We only had a little food. We were hungry until we got a meal at a tavern in Washington where we stopped for the night. We were all very sour tempered.



June 22, 1835

We've passed many small towns so far. Most have a church, a store, a tavern, and some even have a school. I hope I will get to go to school when we get to Ohio! Stopped in the town of Claysville.



June 23, 1835

We have reached Wheeling! Tomorrow we will be in Ohio.

June 24, 1835

We took a ferry across the Ohio River. The land is much flatter here and the farms look very good. In St. Clairsville we left the National Road. Long after dark we made it to Uncle George's farm. I am very happy to be here.



Thought Questions:

1. This is a story of travel in the 1835. How is travel different today?
2. Although there are many differences between travel in the past and today, what is still the same?
3. Would you have wanted to travel west along the National Road in the 1835? Why or why not?