

## Section 8

### Language Arts

#### Writing

Writing ideas are abundant regarding the Oregon Trail. The ideas below are just a sample of what can be done to generate ideas in order to get students started writing on this general theme.

1. Narcissa Whitman constantly wrote to her family and friends. Either read aloud to students or have students read some of the letters that Narcissa wrote herself. This will enable students to understand the basic ideas of regarding what Narcissa wrote about to others, how she felt about events in her life, etc. Have students pretend that they themselves are Narcissa or Marcus Whitman and encourage students to write their own personal letters home. When letters are completed, they could be exchanged with another student and responses could also be generated. A continuous dialogue could develop throughout the school year.
2. During the winter months, read from the book, Coyote Was Going There, by Jarold Ramsey. Have students make up and write down their own stories and legends. (Coyote is the name of a particular character in Indian legends. These stories should be told only during the winter. It is said that, "a snake will crawl up your leg" if told during other seasons.)
3. Have students write short stories (individually or as a group project) and then substitute sign language for written words. Students can make up the sign language and perform stories in front of the class (using sign language only). See if other students can figure out the story line.
4. Perform a skit or a play about pioneer or Indian life. Props could be designed and constructed as an art activity and music could be taught during music class (if possible to incorporate with other staff).
5. Have students write reports on occupations of yesterday. Obviously, historical occupations were different than today, due in part, to advances in technology. A brainstorming session, followed by a library research activity session could begin this assignment. A variation would be to discuss and develop papers dealing with occupations of today that possibly will not be necessary in another hundred years.
6. Discuss necessary ingredients and steps involved in the preparation of traditional pioneer and Indian foods. Have students write about cooking techniques, create recipes and design steps for preparation and cooking of their dishes.
7. Read the poem PIONEER by Beulah Hastings Wilson. Have students look up any words which they are not familiar with in the dictionary. Then in groups of two or three have them write down the meaning of the poem.

## Pioneer

His beard was grizzled, his coat was frayed  
And his wagon's cloth had long been grayed.  
His cumbersome oxen bawled their disdain,  
And terror awaited him on the next plain.

Loved ones died and he mourned near the ground  
As he buried his dead in their lonely mounds,  
And hearing the children wail at night  
He read his bible by the fire's pale light.

He left me this rich heritage:  
His faith in God, his enduring grace,  
His rusty gun and his oxen bell  
And these words he shouted, I cherish still:

"Westward, Ho! —on and on,  
Safely home to Washington!"

Belulah Hastings Wilson

8. Read the passage describing Spring on the Prairie from "Little House on the Prairie" to the students. Identify adjectives and the nouns that are described. Brainstorm adjectives for the other seasons on a large sheet of butcher paper. Using the adjectives on the butcher paper, have students complete the paragraph (bottom of page) to describe another season such as Fall, Winter, or Summer.

Spring On the Prairie

by

Laura Ingalls Wilder

Spring had come. The warm winds smelled exciting, and all outdoors was large and bright and sweet. Big white shining clouds floated high up in the clear space. Their shadows floated over the prairie. Their shadows were thin and brown, and all the rest of the prairie was the pale, soft colors of dead grasses.

\_\_\_\_\_ on the Prairie  
by \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ had come. The \_\_\_\_\_ winds smelled \_\_\_\_\_,  
and all outdoors was \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
\_\_\_\_\_ clouds \_\_\_\_\_ floated  
high up in the \_\_\_\_\_ space. Their shadows floated  
\_\_\_\_\_. Their shadows were  
\_\_\_\_\_, and all the rest of the  
prairie was \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

9. Have students create and keep a diary. Remind students that a diary is very personal. Diaries may include special events with which students are involved, news about friends and family, how they feel about important world happenings, original songs or poems, and dreams or plans about the future. Above all, stress that they should enjoy what they write in their diary. Review the importance of diaries that the pioneers placed upon them to preserve family history. They can do the same. Some things to do with diaries would be:

- a. Have each student decorate a cover for their diary. Have them make precise measurements when they create the cover. Measure not only in standard measurement but also in metric measurement and then compare.
- b. With the help of parents or other relatives, students can complete a simple family tree.
- c. Students can follow written or oral directions, and complete tasks in a sequence. They can then write entries in their diaries based on these instructions.
- d. Borrow copies of actual overland diaries from the library. Have students read passages from these diaries to understand the overall idea of what was written and included in the diaries. They can then tell stories to younger children based on these diaries or possibly make up stories inspired by what they read in the diary.
- e. Discuss the vast changes in information processing since the days of the Oregon Trail when information was recorded in notebooks with pen and pencil. Some students can do research on when the first typewriter was invented. Who invented the first machine to record sound? When did the first computers come into general use? When did the first camera become available to take pictures of ordinary people? Relate all of these to the Oregon Trail and the lack of these products at that time. Show the progress that we have made in preserving and recording history. Ask students what events or important discoveries of today will stand out and be rediscovered 100-150 years from now. Why?
- f. Set up a learning center where you have placed copies of pioneer diaries. At the same time, have a blank book or notebook where students can write down

their thoughts throughout the day. Inform them that they can either write about classroom events or something personal.

g. As a letter writing activity, have students establish pen pals with students in cities along the Oregon Trail. Have a class map with everyone locating and marking their city and pen pal along the trail.

## A Family Weighs the Pros and Cons

Directions: Read the attached page which has editorials showing the pros and cons for going to the Oregon Country. Discuss these pros and cons. Where do you feel your family would stand on going to the Oregon Country? Would they go? Why or why not? What would your reaction be to their decision?

I think my family would have gone to Oregon because:

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My reaction:

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I think my family would not have gone to Oregon because:

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My reaction:

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Write an editorial of your own describing why you should or should not go to the Oregon Country. Back your editorial up with facts or realistic views.

## **Do We Go, Or Stay?**

### **Editorials saying: "Go to Oregon!"**

St. Louis Gazette: The Rocky Mountains can be crossed by wagons and families. There is no obstruction the whole route that any person would dare call a mountain. Even delicate missionary women have crossed the mountains with no ill effects.

In Oregon, there are spacious, fertile valleys where good crops can be grown, and free land is available. Although there is still land to be had back east, prices are rising and economic conditions are poor. No one need starve on the overland journey if they plan carefully. Provisions can be taken to last for months, and game is plentiful. In fact, the health of over-landers should improve in the great outdoors.

Missouri Gazette: The Indians are hostile, true, but over-landers traveling together in large wagon trains are safe. In all probability they would not meet with an Indian to interrupt their progress. The army has forts and soldiers to protect travelers and more will be provided.

New Orleans Daily Picayune: Those bound for Oregon are Pioneers, like those of Israel that followed Moses through the wilderness. Going to Oregon is also patriotic. It is our manifest destiny to settle the west.

Editorials saying: "Do not go to Oregon!"

North American Review: Why go to Oregon to get land? An Illinois farm of the finest land would be far superior.

Daily Missouri Republican: Families with wagons will never be able to cross the mountains. Men should not subject their wives and children to all degrees of suffering.

New Orleans Weekly Bulletin: The Indians in the west are hostile. The wagon trains would be in constant jeopardy.

The New York Aurora: Most of their over-landers and their animals will die of starvation and exposure in the vast desert areas of the west. It is madness and a folly to attempt a trip to Oregon.

Liverpool Times: The country is expanding too fast. Besides, the Oregon Country is claimed by the British. If war comes it would be impossible to defend it.

## Sign Language on the Plains

Many different languages were spoken among Indians. Because of this situation, Native Americans often used sign language to communicate with each other.

Part 1. Pretend that you are a pioneer and have come across a group of Indians. In order to communicate, you must use sign language. In the space below write down words and sentences which you would like to communicate to the Indians.

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Part 2. How would you communicate your message to the Indians? Develop and practice communicating your sentences and ideas using a sign language, which you will make up. Remember, you can leave out words such as: The, a, it, and, at, etc.

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Part 3. Share your language with a friend. Can your friend understand what you are trying to say? Improve your sign language and practice if your friend cannot understand you. Share your sign language with the class.

## Literature

There is an abundant supply of literature available that is related to the Oregon Trail theme. A few books which you can use as a literature based reading program are:

Stout Hearted Seven by Neta Lohnes Frazier  
Courage of Sarah Noble by Alice Dalgliesh

### Legend of the Bridge of the Gods

Where the Cascades of the Columbia are now, there once was a huge arch under which the river flowed. Over the river was a broad and level roadway over which the people of the south and the people of the north rode back and forth. This was not too long ago—perhaps five or six, old, old [women] ago.

This bridge was known by the Indians as the Bridge of Tomaniwuas. At this time the country to the south and the north was a fertile plain. There did not exist the peaks of St. Helens, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Adams. Midway in the bridge a fire was kept burning by an old witch woman. Her hair was scraggly, her teeth were yellow and cracked, and she had the scolding, cackling voice of all witch women. Her name was Loowit. Indians would try to steal the fire. She would not even let them come near to get warm, and even though she felt sorry for them, she scolded and scourged them so they would not come too near.

Finally she could no longer stand it, and she asked Tomaniwuas if she might give the fire to the people. He consented and she gave the people the fire so they might be warm and eat cooked food.

Now the people stopped and talked to Loowit as they passed back and forth. There were two great chiefs living at this time—Wyeast, chief of the southern Indians, and Klickitat, chief of the northern Indians. The chiefs were friends and often met on the bridge. Loowit thought they were handsome.

One night when Tomaniwuis came to talk to her, she asked that he might grant one wish to her. He said that because she was very faithful, he would grant her just one wish. She asked that she might be young and beautiful. Tomaniwuis sighed because he was afraid that there would be trouble, but he granted her wish.

The next day, tales of Loowit's new beauty spread far and near on the two sides of the river. Many young braves came to admire her, and she no longer had to gather the wood as the young men brought it to her. Above all the young men, Loowit liked Wyeast and Klickitat the best. Both of the great chiefs fell in love with her too, but she could not choose which one she liked the best. Before this, the people of the north and south had been friendly, but now with the two chief's rivals for the hand of Loowit, the two nations became rivals too. The chiefs no longer stopped to talk on the bridge. The people no longer went back and forth in peace. Wars broke out and people were killed.

Tomaniwuis was angry with Loowit and one night he came down to the bridge. Loowit begged him not to change her back into an old crone.

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No,” said Tomaniwuis, “I will kill you.”

“No,” cried Loowit, “What will Wyeast and Klickitat do without me?”

“I will destroy them, too,” answered Tomaniwuis. “If they were really good chiefs, they would not let their people go to war about just a woman.”

Tomaniwuis killed them both and the two great chiefs went without a murmur of fear. Then Tomaniwuis warned the people on the north and the south to stay a long way from the bridge as he would destroy it so that ever after the tribes would be separated.

That night the thunder roared and the lightening flashed. The earth trembled for miles around. In the center of the arch, a crack appeared. Another appeared six yards from it and a great section of the bridge fell into the river. With it went the fire which Loowit had kept burning until her death. The next morning the fire was no more and in the place of the bridge, the water tumbled over great rocks that had fallen down.

Tomaniwuis did not want to bury the lovely Loowit and her two braves, so he turned them into beautiful mountains where all could see their beauty. Loowit became Mt. St. Helens on the north side with the northern chief, Klickitat, becoming Mt. Adams, beside her. On the south side loomed the southern chief, Wyeast, as he turned into the shining Mt. Hood. These peaks still stand today.

This is just one Northwest Indian legend. In fact, there is more than one version of this legend with all of them being correct depending on which tribe's version you are reading.

### **Legend of the Ki-Use Girls**

According to the Walla Walla Indians' tradition, the supernatural animal or the animal which has “medicine powers” is the wolf. Other Indian tribes attribute these powers to various animals such as the coyote, whale, eagle etc. The Walla Walla Indians were located in the southeastern portion of Washington, and the Ki-Use Girls or Twins is a legend about two extraordinary rocks on the Columbia River.

The wolf, the great medicine man, was walking home one day when he came across three beautiful Ki-use (Cayuse) girls. He fell desperately in love with them. The wolf watched as they carried stones into the river. They were trying to make an artificial cascade or rapid, to catch the salmon that would leap over it. The wolf secretly watched their operations throughout the rest of the day. But during the night, the wolf would come and destroy what they had built. He did this for successive evenings. On the fourth morning, he saw the girls weeping on the bank, and inquired what was the matter. They told him they were starving, as they could get no fish since they have no

dam. The wolf then proposed to build a dam for them, if they would become his wives. The Ki-use girls consented or sooner die from the lack of food. The wolf built a dam using stones which stretched from one end of the Columbia to the other.

For a long time he lived happily with the three sisters (a custom very frequent among the Indians, who marry as many sisters in a family as they possibly can); but at a length the wolf became jealous of his wives, and, by his medicine powers, changed two of them into basalt pillars, on the south side of the river. He then changed himself into a large rock, somewhat similar to them, on the north side, so that he might watch them for ever afterwards. But what happened to the third sister? Did you not notice a cavern between the rocks where the river now flows? That is all that remains of her.

\*\*\*This legend was written down by the artist, Paul Kane, as he made his way throughout the northwest in the 1840's. This was how the Indians of the Walla Walla and Cayuse tribes explained the rocks bordering the Columbia River near the present Walulla Junction.

### **Indian Legends of the Northwest**

Grandmother Stories of the Northwest. By Nashone. Published by Sierra Oaks Publishing Company.

Coyote Was Going There. By Jarold Ramsey. Published by University of Washington Press.