

# Oregon Trail Education Trunk

## Curriculum Overview

The Wyoming State Museum is extremely excited for you to try out this exciting Oregon Trail curriculum. This overview tells you what to expect within each section of the curriculum. The following pages will dive deeper into each activity. Most of these sections can even be completed before you receive the trunk or after you send it back.

- **Section 1: The Five Big Questions of the Oregon Trail**  
This section consists of a video, produced by the Wyoming State Museum, that teaches students the five big questions of the Oregon Trail. Afterwards, your students will complete a crossword puzzle to reinforce the information from the video.
- **Section 2: Why Would You Travel the Trails?**  
This section puts students in the shoes of an immigrant traveling west. They will pick one of the nine main reasons why immigrants traveled west (discussed in the “Five Big Questions” video) and write an opinion piece about why they (personally) would take this dangerous journey.
- **Section 3: Exploring History Through Artifacts**  
This section allows students to get hands-on with one artifact from the education trunk. They will do small group work, handle artifacts, draw pictures, and use critical thinking to hypothesize about what their artifact was used for.
- **Section 4: Reading an Oregon Trail Guidebook**  
In this section, students will read a guidebook telling them what to pack on their journey to Oregon. This guidebook was written by compiling the advice of three original sources from the 1840s. Students will also fill out a vocabulary sheet to learn some of the more unique words included within the guide.
- **Section 5: Packing Your Wagon**  
To prepare for their journey, your students will work in small groups to pack everything they’ll need for the long trip west. First, they will watch a short video from the museum to give them tips and hints for packing their wagons. Then, they’ll go through the general store to decide what they’re bringing with them. They’ll use mathematics to fill out their worksheet.
- **Section 6: Field Trip and Game with the Wyoming State Museum**  
Now that your students have packed their wagons, we’re ready to head west! The museum has created a very special field trip to accompany this education trunk. Your students will play a live action version of the Oregon Trail video game. We will see many of the important landmarks along the trail, talk about how the immigrants lived on their journey, and discuss the dangers of the trail. Your students will also see amazing historical artifacts from this time period. How well your students packed their wagons will influence whether they survive this deadly expedition.

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## Why Would You Travel West

### Section 2: Why Would You Travel West?

This section puts students in the shoes of an immigrant traveling west. They will pick one of the nine main reasons why immigrants traveled west (discussed in the “Five Big Questions” video) and write an opinion piece about why they (personally) would take this dangerous journey.

**This activity can be completed before you receive the trunk in your classroom.**

- Activity 1: “Why Would You Travel West” Writing Prompt Worksheet

Give each student a copy of the writing prompt worksheet. They will read the information on the front of the worksheet, then write about why they would have journeyed west, if they lived during the Oregon Trail time period. You can print this document from any “Oregon Trail” page of the Wyoming State Museum website or photocopy it from the “Student Worksheets” section of this book.

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## Why Would You Travel the Trails

About 300,000 immigrants traveled the Oregon Trail, California Trail, and Mormon Trail from 1840-1860. They faced a difficult and dangerous journey; many of them would die before they ever saw the west.

The ones that survived would have to walk 15 miles a day for up to six months. They ate the same food over and over again, every day. They slept outside during rainstorms, blizzards, and all other dangerous weather. The journey was long, treacherous, and miserable. Most of them would never see the friends and family members they left behind, ever again.



The immigrants chose to face these dangers for many different reasons. Below are the main reasons we discussed in the “Five Big Questions” video. Choose a reason that would cause you to brave this arduous (difficult) trip. Write a short explanation of why you would risk the journey to either Oregon, California, or Utah.

### Why Immigrants Traveled West

To Farm the Fertile Land

To Find Adventure

To Find Gold

To Become Merchants

To Find Religious Freedom

To Secure the Oregon Territory

To Escape Debt

To Perform Missionary Service

To Escape the Civil War





