

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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An Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California

Section 4: Reading an Oregon Trail Guidebook

In this section, students will read a guidebook telling what to pack on their journey to Oregon. This guidebook was written by compiling the advice of three original sources from the 1840s. The main source for this guidebook was “The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California” written by Lansford W. Hastings, published in 1845. The guidebook included in this trunk is very similar to Hastings’ guide (word for word in many places). The museum simply edited the sentence structure and vocabulary to make it easier for modern 4th graders.

Your students will read this guidebook and fill out a vocabulary sheet to learn some of the more unique words from the guide. The information found within this guidebook will be vital to correctly packing their wagon in the next activity.

There is a copy of the original 1845 guidebook in the education trunk as well, if you are curious about it. One interesting note is that the original guidebook recommended the perilous “Hastings’ Cutoff.” This dangerous pass was the downfall of the ill-fated Donner Party.

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

- Activity 1: “An Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California” Guidebook

Give each student a copy of the student guidebook. They will read the guidebook and learn about what immigrants took with them on their dangerous journey to the West. You can print the student guidebook from any “Oregon Trail” page of the Wyoming State Museum website or photocopy it from the “Student Worksheets” section of this book.

- Activity 2: “An Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California” Vocabulary Worksheet

Students will use computers, tablets, dictionaries, or other resources in the classroom to define vocabulary terms. You can give the worksheet to your students to fill out before they read the student guidebook or give it to them to fill out as they’re reading the guidebook. 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.

An Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California



1

This guide was written through analyzing multiple references, published from 1840-1860. This included:

“The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California”
Lansford W. Hastings - 1845

“Palmer's Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains”
Joel Palmer - 1847

St. Joseph, Missouri Gazette
Article on March 19, 1847

2

Welcome

This guide is designed to prepare a traveler for the great trip to the West. Being equipped and supplied, as it is suggested here, the emigrant may set out upon this wild and interesting excursion. They will not suffer toil, hardship, or eminent danger. They will enjoy many extraordinary and pleasing scenes, and safely arrive at their desired destination.

3

Weapons

Each wagon should be equipped with a good rifle, at least 5 pounds of gunpowder, and at least 20 pounds of lead shot. If revolvers can be afforded, they are also a fine addition to an emigrant's supplies. However, they should not be considered indispensable.



4

Wagons

Good and substantial wagons should always be selected. However firm and staunch they may appear, they should be examined and repaired before leaving the States. Otherwise, the emigrant may set out with what they believe is a good wagon, only to be stranded after a few hundred miles when the wagon's defects have become obvious.

5

One of the most important rules of the trail is to limit weight as much as possible. The prairie schooner recommended by this guide should never be loaded with more than 2,500 pounds. Leaving Independence with a wagon that is overloaded or has hidden mechanical problems will inevitably end with a stranded wagon party who must rely on the kindness of friends or be left behind to perish.

6

Livestock

The horse is preferable for the saddle. But no horse can be used daily, whether in saddle or wagon harness, throughout the entire trip. Therefore, they are not feasible for use as a wagon team. Mules are preferred to horses, when it comes to wagon teams. But, their extreme slowness, stubborn intractability, and tendency to suffer from fatigue make them an unwise choice.

7

Oxen are the preferred beast for this kind of expedition. Oxen endure the fatigue and heat much better than either horses or mules. They also subsist much better on vegetation alone, and require no additional feed. Each wagon should have four yoke of good oxen, and two good milk cows. Milk is a great luxury on the road.



8

Food

It is imperative to pack enough food to survive the journey to the West. The list below shows the food that is needed for each traveler.

200 pounds of flour
100 pounds of bacon
30 pounds of beans
30 pounds of hardtack
20 pounds of sugar
12 pounds of dried fruit
10 pounds of coffee
10 pounds of rice

9

In addition, each wagon party should bring at least 30 pounds of salt, an ample supply of vinegar, 150 pounds of lard, 25 pounds of corn meal, and a small amount of tea and saleratus. Other food items should be avoided, as they provide little value versus the weight they add to the wagon.



10

Wild Game

While wild game, such as bison, may be hunted along the way, emigrants should not rely on this while planning. Additionally, with each passing year, the great herds shrink ever smaller. Many a traveler has starved to death along the trail

due to
poor
planning
in Missouri.



11

Cookware

Good cookware is essential on the trail. However, very few extra cooking utensils should be taken. They add too much to the wagon load and should be avoided. A Dutch oven, frying pan, tea kettle, teapot, and coffee pot are all the cookware an average family needs on the trail. Tin cups, tin plates, and ordinary knives, forks, and spoons should also be taken for each traveler.

12

Clothing

Each member of the wagon party should be supplied with enough sets of clothing to last a full year. Walking all day long, for a period of four to six months, wears out clothes at a much faster rate than normal.

Additionally, emigrants will be outside during sun, storm, and cold. Having proper clothing is paramount.

13

Each individual should also be equipped with enough pairs of boots to last up to six months. The average emigrant walks 15 miles a day, and will go through a significant number of shoes during the trip.



14

Bedding

Bedding should consist of nothing more than blankets, sheets, coverlets, and pillows. These items should be spread over a bison robe or oiled cloth to keep the wet ground off the emigrants' bedding.



15

Feather beds are sometimes taken by families. But, in many cases they are not only burdensome and inconvenient, but also entirely useless. Oftentimes they are left along the trail.



16

Tools

A good set of tools will be invaluable along the trail and upon reaching Oregon or California. This should include axes, shovels, hoes, and at least 60 feet of rope for each oxen. Additionally, a set of blacksmith tools, used for repairing wagons, will be vital for emigrants. This includes axletrees, chains, hammers, and other tools of the trade.

17

Wagon parties should also include a few surgical tools and a small assortment of medicines. Accidents and disease are all too common on the trail west. These items can be used by doctor and layman, alike.



18

Tents

Emigrants should provide themselves with good wagon covers and sturdy tents. The weather along the trail to the West can be unpredictable and violent. Wagon parties will be sleeping outside in all types of weather, and will find these items worth their weight in gold throughout the journey to Oregon or California.

19

Trade Items

It is also advised to bring along items that can be traded with the native peoples living along the trail. Beads, handkerchiefs, blankets, clothing, knives, fish hooks, gunpowder, lead shot, and iron arrowheads are all sought after items by tribes living across the continent.



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Vocabulary Sheet

As you're reading the guidebook, you'll come across some new words. Use the resources in your classroom to look up and define these terms.

Emigrant:

Gunpowder:

Indispensable:

Staunch:

Prairie Schooner:

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Vocabulary Sheet

As you're reading the guidebook, you'll come across some new words. Use the resources in your classroom to look up and define these terms.

Perish:

Subsist:

Hardtack:

Saleratus:

Dutch Oven:

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Vocabulary Sheet

As you're reading the guidebook, you'll come across some new words. Use the resources in your classroom to look up and define these terms.

Paramount:

Bison Robe:

Burdensome:

Invaluable:

Layman:
