

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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Packing Your Wagon

Section 5: Packing Your Wagon

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

- Activity 1: “Packing Your Wagon” Video

Students will watch a video to learn about how immigrants on the Oregon Trail packed their wagons. Students will learn about the type of wagon used, what animals immigrants brought along, and more. Then, they'll learn a few tips and tricks to help with the Packing Your Wagon activity. This includes tips like “Don't pack more than 2,500 pounds,” and “Really pay attention to how much food the guide tells you to bring.” It will help them to not make the most common mistakes that could end up killing them in the game. This video is available from the Wyoming State Museum website, on any of the “Oregon Trail” pages.

- Activity 2: “Packing Your Wagon” Group Activity

This activity may take a little time, **but it is required** before your students have their field trip and play the live action Oregon Trail game with the museum.

Put your students into groups of four or less; you may **NOT** have any groups of five. All groups larger than four will not be able to pack enough food and will starve when we play the game. If you have groups of three or two, have them create imaginary friends to bring their total number of immigrants up to four.

Give each group one of the “Packing Your Wagon” worksheets and one of the “General Store” card boxes. Each student will need their copy of their guidebook too. The “General Store” cards show every item that is available at the general store in Independence, Missouri. The cards also tell students some great information about the item, and list how much it weighs.

Your students should use their guidebooks to decide what to bring with them. They may take as many copies of each item as they want, but they may not go over 2,500 pounds. The worksheet is where they'll put the names of each immigrant in their wagon. They'll also list each item they are bringing with them, and add up their total weight.

There are ten copies of the “General Store” cards in the education trunk. You can print a digital copy of the cards (and print the worksheet) from any “Oregon Trail” page of the Wyoming State Museum website or photocopy them from the “Student Worksheets” section of this book.

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The Oregon Trail: Pack Your Wagon Activity



Your Wagon Number:

Immigrant #1:

Immigrant #2:

Your Wagon Party Name:

Immigrant #3:

Immigrant #4:

Welcome to the Oregon Trail! You are about to start the adventure of your lives, as you travel more than 2,000 miles from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City, Oregon!

Facts of the Trail

- About 300,000 immigrants traveled the trail from 1840-1860.
- They left their homes behind and sold almost everything they owned to afford the trip to Oregon, California, or Utah.
- Most of them would never see the friends and family they left behind, ever again.
- Most travelers started in Independence, Missouri or other nearby cities.
- The trip could take anywhere from four to six months, depending on when the immigrants left and how lucky they got.
- When the immigrants arrived, there would be no home waiting for them. They would have to build their house with whatever tools they brought with them.

Life on the Trail

- The pioneers rarely rode in the wagons, due to the brutal bumps. Almost everyone had to walk beside the wagon... up to fifteen miles per day.
- There were no hotels along the trail. The immigrants camped the entire way.
- There were no grocery stores along the trail, either. They passed a very small number of trading posts and forts. They also had a few opportunities to trade with Native Americans. But the immigrants had to bring most of their supplies.
- The pioneers had to be outside during extreme cold, intense heat, severe thunderstorms, and all other weather.

Discuss the following questions in your wagon group.

- What would be the most important thing you would take with you?
- Which of these would bother you the most and why?
 - Being hungry.
 - Eating the same things every day.
 - Being cold and wet.
 - Walking 15 miles a day.
 - Not having your favorite personal item.
 - Having bugs crawl into your blankets.
 - Not feeling safe.
 - Being stranded in the wilderness.
 - Never seeing your friends or family again.
 - Having to bathe in cold rivers.



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The Oregon Trail: Pack Your Wagon Activity



With your wagon party, examine the newspaper article and the cards at your table. Use these resources to pick how many of each item your team will be bringing on your trip to Oregon. Fill out your shopping list, and then bring it and your cards to the General Store.

Weight = The weight of one card, for each type of item.

Number = The total number of cards that you will be bringing, for each type of item.

Total = The total weight of each type of item. Multiply **Weight** and **Number** together.

Total Weight of All Supplies:

	Item	Weight	Number	Total	
Cooking	Cookware	35 lbs.			
	Soap	10 lbs.			
	Stove	300 lbs.			
	Water Keg	5 lbs.			
Food	Bacon	100 lbs.			
	Beans	30 lbs.			
	Coffee	10 lbs.			
	Corn Meal	25 lbs.			
	Dried Fruit	25 lbs.			
	Flour	100 lbs.			
	Fresh Fruit	25 lbs.			
	Hardtack	60 lbs.			
	Lard	150 lbs.			
	Rice	20 lbs.			
	Saleratus	5 lbs.			
	Salt	20 lbs.			
	Sugar	20 lbs.			
	Tea	5 lbs.			
	Vinegar	25 lbs.			
	Weapons	Gunpowder	5 lbs.		
		Lead Shot	10 lbs.		
Revolvers		10 lbs.			
Rifle		10 lbs.			

	Item	Weight	Number	Total
Personal Items	Bedroll	5 lbs.		
	Books	30 lbs.		
	Boots	3 lbs.		
	Chair	20 lbs.		
	China Set	40 lbs.		
	Clothing	3 lbs.		
	Dresser	50 lbs.		
	Family Clock	100 lbs.		
	Heavy Coat	3 lbs.		
	Heirlooms	5 lbs.		
	Instrument	5 lbs.		
	Medicine	10 lbs.		
	Mirror	10 lbs.		
	Table	25 lbs.		
	Toys	10 lbs.		
	Trade Goods	10 lbs.		
	Tools	Canoe	60 lbs.	
Extra Parts		75 lbs.		
Fishing Gear		5 lbs.		
Iron Safe		75 lbs.		
Tent		50 lbs.		
Tools		50 lbs.		
Wagon Tools	100 lbs.			





Cookware

35 lbs.

This cookware consists of a cast iron skillet, dutch oven, coffee pot, cooking utensils, eating utensils, and a few dishes.



Soap

10 lbs.

While pioneers took few baths on the trail, soap was important for washing dishes, clothes, and for keeping themselves clean.





Stove

300 lbs.

The cast iron stove was a staple within homes during the 1800s and used to cook meals.



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Water Keg

5 lbs.

The trail had long stretches without water. Pioneers would fill up their water keg at a stream before braving these dry areas.



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Bacon

100 lbs.

Salted bacon was a great food for the trail. Stored in bran barrels (to keep it from melting), it could last the entire trip.



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Beans

30 lbs.

Beans were a staple of the pioneer diet. They were often eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner on the trail.



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Coffee

10 lbs.

Coffee was one of the most vital items for the trip. Pioneers loved drinking it with meals, and it hid the taste of dirty or foul water.



Cornmeal

25 lbs.

Cornmeal was used on the trail to make a variety of foods. One of the most popular was cornmeal pancakes.





Dried Fruit

25 lbs.

Fruit was a great treat on the trail. Dried fruit lasted much longer than fresh. Pioneers mainly brought apples, pears, figs, and raisins.



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Flour

100 lbs.

Bread was a staple of the pioneer diet, and flour was used to make it daily. It was also used to make hardtack and biscuits.



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Fresh Fruit

25 lbs.

Fresh fruit is part of a healthy diet. In the 1800s, people ate fresh fruit whenever they could to get vitamins, fiber, and minerals.



Hardtack

60 lbs.

Hardtack was a necessary, but hated, food item. It was similar to a thick cracker, and eaten when the weather was too bad to cook.





Lard

150 lbs.

Lard is made from animal fat (usually a pig) and was used for cooking. It was used much like butter is used today.



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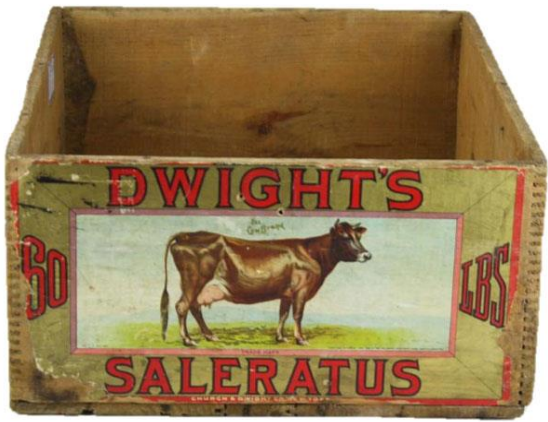
Rice

20 lbs.

Rice was a great meal to eat on the trail. It stored well, was easy to cook, could be eaten with dried meat, and filled hungry bellies.



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Saleratus

5 lbs.

Saleratus was an important ingredient when baking on the trail. It is still used today, but is known as baking soda.



Salt

20 lbs.

Salt was used for cooking and for flavoring foods. It was also used to preserve meat that was hunted along the trail.





Sugar

20 lbs.

Brown and white sugar was used for making pies, cakes, and jams on the trail. It was also used for flavoring.



Tea

5 lbs.

Tea was a very popular drink throughout much of the 1800s. Like coffee, it was drunk often on the trail.





Vinegar

25 lbs.

Apple vinegar was used for food processing and canning, to treat cuts and scrapes, and for flavoring in food.



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Gunpowder

5 lbs.

Gunpowder was needed for all guns. But, it was dangerous and could explode if it was exposed to fire.



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Lead Shot

10 lbs.

Lead shot is the projectile that rifles, shotguns, and revolvers shot on the trail. Pioneers could not hunt without it.



Revolvers

10 lbs.

If revolvers could be afforded, they were a good item to have on the trail. This represents two black powder revolvers.





Rifle

10 lbs.

Rifles were an important tool while on the trail. They could be used for hunting or protecting the wagon train.

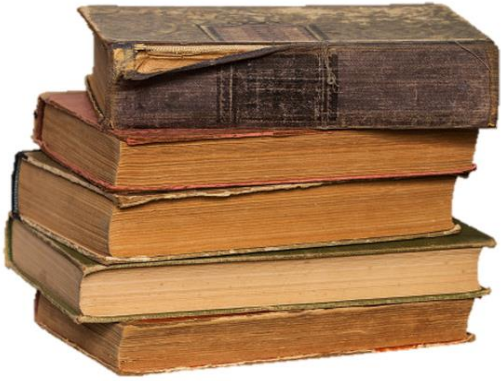


Bedroll

18 lbs.

Bedding on the trail consisted of bison robes, blankets, and pillows. Some of these items were handmade before the trip.





Books

30 lbs.

This is a box of fifteen books to help pass the time while on the trail to California or Oregon.



Boots

3 lbs.

Walking 2000 miles over five months broke down the boots of the pioneers. This is one extra pair of boots for one person.





Chair

20 lbs.

Chairs could be used for comfort along the trail and to decorate the pioneers' future homes in Oregon or California.



China Set

40 lbs.

Some pioneers would bring treasured family heirlooms, like this china set - a gift from the wedding of two grandparents.





Clothing

3 lbs.

Good clothing was important, as the constant walking took its toll on clothes. This is one extra set of clothing for one person.



Dresser

50 lbs.

Some pioneers took furniture along the trail to help with the journey and to use in their new homes. This is a family dresser.





Family Clock

100 lbs.

This is a family heirloom, passed down from great grandparents. It is a cherished piece of family history.



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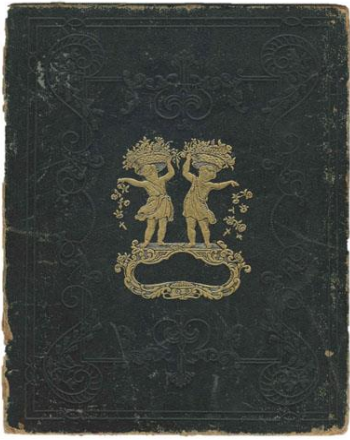
Heavy Coat

5 lbs.

Pioneers had to keep walking in almost every type of weather condition. This is one heavy coat in case of cold weather.



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Heirlooms

5 lbs.

These are the most precious family heirlooms for a family. They might include photos, journals, keepsakes, and a family holy book.



Instrument

5 lbs.

A musical instrument could be a source of enjoyment and happiness on the long, 2,000 mile journey.





Medicine

10 lbs.

Medicine, while seldom effective, was an important item to bring on the trail. This kit also includes surgical supplies.



Mirror

10 lbs.

This mirror is a family keepsake and has been used for years by the entire family.





Table

25 lbs.

Some pioneers took furniture along the trail to help with the journey and to use in their new homes. This is a family table.

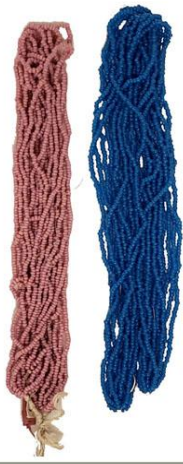


Toys

10 lbs.

Children of all ages joined their parents on the trail. This is one box of toys to keep the children entertained.





Trade Goods

10 lbs.

Beads, fishing hooks, clothing, blankets, and cookware were often taken, to be traded with Native American tribes on the trail.



Canoe

60 lbs.

Canoes had already been used on North American rivers and lakes for thousands of years before the Oregon Trail.





Extra Parts

75 lbs.

A broken wagon could mean death for an entire family. This is one spare part (wheel, axle, tongue, etc.) for a family wagon.



Fishing Gear

5 lbs.

The wagons traveled along rivers for a good portion of the trail. Fishing gear was used to try to catch fish.





Iron Safe

75 lbs.

Some pioneers brought small iron safes on the trail to keep their money and prized heirlooms safe from theft.



Tent

50 lbs.

Tents were used by pioneers at night when it was too rainy, snowy, or dusty to sleep under the stars.





Tools

50 lbs.

This tool kit has shovels, hoes, hatchets, saws, hammers, and other tools to help along the trail and to build a new home.



Wagon Tools

100 lbs.

Blacksmith tools were used to fix broken parts of pioneer wagons, along with other broken items along the trail.

