



Pack Your Wagon

Exploring Tough Decisions Made On the Pioneer Trails

Overview

The men, women, and children who traveled west in wagon trains and handcart troops had to make difficult decisions about what to take. In this activity, students will work in groups to think critically about the scope and needs of these pioneers. Students will evaluate the necessary items for travelling a historic emigrant trail and experiment with representative items to “pack their wagon”.

Age Group

4th – 6th Grade

Duration

20-40 minutes (in addition to the tour)

Subjects

Language Arts
Social Studies
Mathematics

Standards of Learning Met

Language Arts

- W.4.7: Incorporates effective techniques such as dialogue, descriptive details, and precise word choice to develop real or imagined experiences or events
- SL.4.1: Paraphrases information read aloud or presented in diverse media and formats
- SL.4.2: Identifies reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points
- SL.4.3: Reports on a topic or text, or retells an event in an organized manner.
- SL.4.5: Differentiates between contexts which call for formal or informal discourse

Social Studies

- SS.5.2.1: Identify and describe the ways groups (e.g., families, communities, schools, and social organizations) meet human needs and concerns (e.g., belonging, self-worth, and personal safety) and contribute to personal identity and daily life
- SS5.2.2: Identify and describe ways in which expressions of culture influence people (e.g., language, spirituality, stories, folktales, music, art, and dance)
- SS5.3.1: Give examples of needs, wants, goods, services, scarcity, and choice
- SS5.3.2: Identify basic economic concepts (e.g., supply, demand, price, and trade)



- SS5.4.4: Discuss different groups that a person may belong to (e.g., family, neighborhood, cultural/ethnic, and workplace) and how those roles and/or groups have changed over time
- SS5.5.3: Describe the human features of an area (e.g., language, religion, political and economic systems, population distribution, and quality of life), past and present settlement patterns (e.g., American Indians and the Oregon Trail), and how ideas, goods, and/or people move from one area to another
- SS5.5.4: Describe how the environment influences people in Wyoming and how we adjust to and/or change our environment in order to survive (e.g., natural resources, housing, and food)
- SS8.2.1: Compare and contrast the ways various groups (e.g., cliques, clubs, ethnic communities, and American Indian tribes) meet human needs and concerns (e.g., self-esteem, friendship, and heritage) and contribute to identity, situations, and events
- SS8.2.2: Examine and evaluate how human expression (e.g., language, literature, arts, architecture, traditions, beliefs, and spirituality) contributes to the development and transmission of culture
- SS8.3.5: Describe how values and beliefs influence individual, family, and business decisions (microeconomics)
- SS8.4.4: Identify historical interactions between and among individuals, groups, and/or institutions (e.g., family, neighborhood, political, economic, religious, social, cultural, and workplace)
- SS8.5.3: Explain how communities' current and past demographics, migrations, and settlement patterns influence place (e.g., culture, needs, and political and economic systems) and use this analysis to predict future settlement patterns

Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Understand the difference between wants and needs
- Analyze items and their needs in relation to travelling westward emigrant trails
- Decide item value and fit these items into a predefined packing space

Materials

Included

- Representative paper blocks for selected items needed to travel west
- Representative wagon bed for packing selected items
- Notebook paper and pencils
- *On the Trail* activity instructions and priority sheets

Key Terms

Emigrant – a person leaving one country to settle in another

Emigrant Trails – the northern networks of overland wagon trails throughout the American West, used by migrants from the eastern United States to settle lands west of the Interior Plains during the overland migrations of the mid-19th century.



Activity Procedures

1. Museum staff introduces students to the Emigrant Trails and the people who traveled them. Who went? Why did they go? How long did the trip take? Were they planning to move or visit?
2. Students are asked to imagine they were going to move across the country, packing everything they own into a wagon. Students are to make a list of everything they would take (this can include modern items). Remind them to prioritize and not just think of personal possessions, but necessary items like food, water, and housing materials. This list must be kept small (approximately 12 items)
3. Students will be grouped into pairs or three to a group. Provide each group with the *On the Trail* rating pieces. Explain the activity and allow each group to rank the scenarios. Does this activity change any of the items they packed? Provide each group with the representative wagon beds and packing items.
4. Groups are now responsible for prioritizing the items and packing them into the wagon bed. Items are not to extend above the bed walls. Encourage students to think critically about what must be packed and what can be obtained along the trail or at the final destination. The priority lists may change several times as students work to pack necessary items. Have students share their packed wagons, defending their priority choices.
5. Museum staff presents scenarios that may occur on the Emigrant Trail (disease, broken wheels, etc.) to see if students packed accordingly.
6. If time allows, give students the chance to debrief. Did they pack the necessary items? Was there something they left behind that they wish they had taken? Discuss their packing priorities and decisions. Museum staff will relate this to the decisions made by pioneers traveling west. Allow times for questions.

Student Name _____

On the Trail
Could You Handle It?

Traveling on the Oregon and Overland Trails including many hazards and hardships for travelers on the trail. Which ones would you find the most difficult to handle? Rank them in order from **Most Challenging** to **Least Challenging**.

- ___ Gathering buffalo chips (manure) to use for cooking fires
- ___ Wearing only two different outfits for the entire five-month journey
- ___ Drinking water from the same stream used by oxen and horses
- ___ Sleeping outside every night, even when it rains
- ___ Getting sick and not having a doctor to treat you
- ___ Walking 2,000 miles and barefoot in warm weather
- ___ Waking up at 5:00 am every day
- ___ Living with bugs, snakes, and the unknown
- ___ Leaving friends and family behind
- ___ Fear of drowning when crossing flooded streams and rivers



The On the Trail activity can also be done with cutouts allowing each group to physically rearrange the scenarios in order from Most Challenging to Least Challenging. Print and cut the following lists so each group has 1 set of scenarios.

Gathering buffalo chips (manure) to use for cooking fires

Wearing only two different outfits for the entire five-month journey

Drinking water from the same stream used by oxen and horses

Sleeping outside every night, even when it rains

Getting sick and not having a doctor to treat you

Walking 2,000 miles and barefoot in warm weather

Waking up at 5:00 am every day

Living with bugs, snakes, and the unknown

Leaving friends and family behind

Fear of drowning when crossing flooded streams and rivers