

Pack Your Wagon Traveling Trunk Lesson Plan

Standards

Grade 4: Nevada Past and Present

- SS. 4.2: Generate and answer supporting questions and use them to construct arguments about the past.
- SS 4.6: Construct responses to compelling questions using reasoning, examples, and relevant details.
- SS 4.8: Participate in a structured academic discussion using evidence and reasoning to share and critique ideas.
- SS 4.10: Use deliberative and democratic procedures to take action about an issue.
- SS. 4.12: Analyze how Nevada's population and culture have changed over time.
- SS 4.13: Analyze the diverse population of Nevada's early inhabitants, natives, and settlers, and discuss their unique experiences and contributions.

Lesson Objectives

Understand: What the emigrants packed on their journey west, what was important to their survival and what may not have made it to the final destination.

Know: The decisions that the emigrants had to make on the California Trail were very hard and very important. A wrong decision could mean the difference between making it to California or not.

Do: Experience the difficult decisions the emigrants had to make on their journey west.

Assessment for Objectives

- Participation
- Could do a writing assignment about what they chose to bring on their journey and what they left behind and their reasons for these decisions.

Introduction

- Why did Americans move west to California?
 - Land
 - Gold Rush

- Better Opportunities
- Adventure
- Have the students ever moved to a new place? How did they get their things from their old house to the new house?
- Can you imagine moving across the country in a covered wagon? (There are many pictures of wagons and oxen and such on the included flash drive to help students visualize the situations)
- After filling the wagon with the necessary food and supplies, very few personal items can be packed in such a small space. How do you choose what to bring?

Activities and Transitions

- Depending on space masking tape can be used inside or chalk used outside to outline the size of the wagon bed. Wagons were usually around 3.5'x8'. This would be a great example of how much space the pioneers really had to pack with.
- Included in the trunk is a list of food items and other necessities the emigrants would have packed on their trip. Talk about how much food they packed and how little room would have been left for their personal belongings.
- Loading the wagon.
 - Have students name off 5-7 items that they feel they “couldn’t live without” in their own lives. Imagine if they could not take those things with them when they moved.
 - Discuss what it is like to move today and how much we are able to pack and take with us.
 - With the items in the trunk laid out, start to load items into trunk. Discuss the importance and significance of the items as they are loaded.
 - Portable Desk- Remember there were no phones in the 1850’s, letters were the only way to communicate and journaling was a common practice. There were also no modern-day ink pens.
- Time to head out! You have crossed the Missouri River and started your journey.
- Average hours of traveling per day- 12-14 hours, start early walk until lunch, take a 1-hour break or so and then walk until evening.

- The 40 Mile Desert in Nevada
 - Just west of Lovelock, Nevada where the Humboldt River sinks into the ground and ends the emigrants were left with a long 40 mile trek before they found water or good grass again for their animals. They traveled across the desert during the hottest part of the year in July and August. Many of their animals died or became too weak to continue pulling the heavy loads in the wagons. The desert was hot, dry and sandy and the emigrants reached it after 3 or 4 months of strenuous travel.
- The sand is too deep, and the oxen are getting too tired to pull the wagon. What is a solution?
 - The wagon is too heavy! A few things are going to have to go!
 - Remembering the items on the supplies list and the items in the trunk, split into groups and have each group pick 3 or 4 items to remove from the wagon.
 - Discuss which items each group chose and why they think they should be removed from their wagon.
- Lightening the Load - Looking at items in trunk, choose several items to remove as a class and explain the consequences of not having them. (Can use the images on flash drive of wagons and oxen to show how little they could carry)
- While many of the emigrants had already started throwing things out of the wagons prior to the desert crossing, this is where most of them were forced to start making hard choices. Some even had to leave behind entire wagons and take only what they could carry.
- Explain that most families moving west took family heirlooms and items that had special meaning to them, though weren't necessary to survive the trip. These were the first items to go. Items that were necessary to survival like food had to be the top priority.

Closing

- Have the students discuss what it might have meant to leave behind important family heirlooms, toys and sometimes their entire wagon in order to make it across the country.

- Talk about the difficult decisions the emigrants had to make on their way west and how those decisions could mean the difference between surviving the journey or not. They were incredibly important decisions. What are some of the decisions we make today that could have bad consequences? How do we ensure we are making the right decisions for ourselves and those around us?

References and Materials Needed

- Supplies list located in trunk
- All of the items in the traveling trunk
- Masking tape (optional)