Oregon Trail Lesson Module

Title:

Using Primary Sources to Discover the Oregon Trail

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Themes: Demographic Changes

Historical Period: National Expansion and Reform

Lesson Module Overview: This lesson module will teach students about the Oregon Trail. They will learn about many different aspects of the trail and life during that time. They will start by learning about the reasoning for traveling west, then learn about the geography of the trail. Next they will learn about what kinds of hardships people faces everyday on the trail and they will end with learning about life in a covered wagon. The students will gain this information through collaborative group projects and by examining documents from the Library Of Congress.

Grade Range: Intermediate/Middle level: 3-6 grade

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DAY 1

**Title:** Motivation for Migration: An Introduction to the Oregon Trail

**Learning Goals:**

**Knowledge**
- Students will recognize that people traveled the Oregon Trail to move west.
- Students will understand that travelers moved for a variety of reasons.
- Students will learn the importance of advertisements in motivation.

**Skills**
- Students will participate in collaborative group work.
- Students will write and act out a scenario about migration.
- Students will create an advertisement or song that would have motivated someone to move west.
- Students will read and analyze primary documents and evaluate their effectiveness to motivate.

**Dispositions**
- Students will develop an understanding of why people would have wanted to travel west on the Oregon Trail.

**National Council for the Social Studies Themes:**
http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands

**Time, Continuity, & Change:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

**People, Places, & Environments:** Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

**Materials Needed:**
US Map
Primary Resources 1, 2, 3 (see Appendix I)
Typed scenarios for why people would move west
Poster paper/construction paper
Glue
Markers/crayons

**Lesson Procedures:**

**Introduction**

1. Ask the students if they have ever moved before. Have a discussion about the types of moves they have been through, such as to a different house, town, state, or country, and why they have moved.
2. Summarize that people move for many different reasons, but everyone has some reason.
3. Ask them if they have ever heard of the Oregon Trail. Explain that the Oregon Trail was a path that hundreds of thousands of people traveled during the 1800s from the eastern side of the United States to the western side (show this on a map). Discuss that this was a time before cars and a time where the land in the west was a mystery to the Americans.
4. Explain that the Americans traveled the Oregon Trail to move for a variety of reasons.

**Development**

1. Divide the class into five groups. Give each group a paper explaining a reason for moving west. These include:
   a. They could get land for free.
   b. Slaves could gain freedom.
   c. The land was good for farming and produced better crops.
   d. There were hardships at home and they wanted a new start.
   e. There was gold to be discovered and people wanted to get rich.
2. Explain that the groups need to act out their reason in front of the class. At least two members need to act this out, but everyone in the group needs to be involved in coming up with the idea for the scenario.
3. Give the children time to come up with a script and practice in their groups.
4. Have one group come up at a time to act out their reason for moving west. Do not have them read their idea, but rather have the students in the other groups try to guess the reason after they have acted.
5. Discuss each reason after each presentation, going more in-depth about the reason.

**Culmination**

1. Explain that people tried to influence each other to move west. Ask the class how they might have done this.
2. Discuss that they did this through making advertisements that would intrigue people and motivate them to move west. Show the examples of the primary documents *Go West!* and *Millions of Acres*. Explain that these advertisements were for the new trains that took people west during that time, but that we are going to be focusing on people traveling west in wagons. Tell the students that there were not as many advertisements that survived that related to just traveling west not on a railroad.
3. Discuss that they also made songs that got some people excited about moving west. Read the first verse of the primary document *To The West!*
4. Tell the students that they are going to be making an advertisement that would motivate others to move west using one of the five reasons they discussed (have these listed on the board for them to see).
5. Have a discussion about what would be in ads or songs that would motivate them to move. Talk about bold print, interesting pictures, and compare the three documents.

**Assessment**
1. Have the children create their advertisements or songs with a partner. Make sure they include a valid reason for why someone might have wanted to move west by taking the Oregon Trail.
2. Have the children present their posters to the class. Hang the posters around the room for the duration of the unit.
LESSON MODULE

DAY 2

Title: Traveling the Oregon Trail!

Learning Goals:

Knowledge

- Students will become familiar with the Oregon Trail and its path through the states of Idaho, Washington, etc. and the role it played in our history.

- Students will develop an understanding of what it is like for some individuals to be traveling on the Trail and the landscape and geographical elements and environment.

- Students will know key what a landform is and how different landforms and landmarks helped pioneers find their way.

Skills

- Students will use knowledge of maps and the key elements that each map includes.

- Students will begin exploring various types of primary sources such as images, documents, and journals.

Dispositions

- Students will develop an ability to consider and analyze multiple perspectives, think, understand cause and effect when considering the past and how it affects how we live now and relating to the hardships people in the past suffered.

National Council for the Social Studies Themes:

Time, Continuity, & Change: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

Power, Authority, & Governance: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Civic Ideals & Practices: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.
Materials Needed:

- Markers/Paint/Crayons
- Recycled Materials (ie, paper, cardboard, cans, bottles, styrofoam)
- Posterboard
- Rulers
- Plywood
- Map

Lesson Procedures:

Introduction

1. Engage the students’ interest by introducing the book “Going West!: Journey on a Wagon Train to Settle a Frontier Town” by Jomann, Carl.

2. During the 1840’s, a large population of pioneers migrated west on the Oregon Trail. For the next 25 years, pioneers traveled around 2,000 miles from Missouri to Oregon's Willamette Valley in search of farmland. Some also joined in the Gold Rush, heading to California in search of gold. The Trail was the only practicable way for settlers to cross the dangerous mountains. Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah and Idaho would probably not be a part of the United States today were it not for the Oregon Trail. Through the activities included in this unit, students will realize the importance of the Oregon Trail in Idaho history. In addition, students will relate the Oregon Trail in to their own lives and how it has impacted how they live today.

2. Show the map of the Oregon Trail, and where the travelers began (in the Midwest), and where it ended (the West Coast). Ask students if they have ever traveled in the areas the Oregon Trail crosses and let students share what they know about the land, climate, and other geographical features. Then tell them if it weren’t for the pioneers that crossed the Oregon Trail they might never had the chance to visit such places in modern day!

3. Explain that the terrain and land of the past was completely different from how it is now. There were no major highways or cities guiding travelers to their destinations. Because the Oregon Trail began in the Midwest, ask them to describe Midwestern geography (generally flat with little-to-no terrain variation.) After establishing Midwestern geography, then explain the geography of mountainous terrain. Explain the level of hardship experienced while crossing a trail that ran through such dangerous geography.
4. Reintroduce a map and explain topographical features. Ask students to imagine what it might have been like at each point and the distance. (Do activity: Cross “Playground Prairie and Mountains” to make it to the end of their very own trail, and then calculate the distance traveled, and compare it to how far the pioneers traveled from start to finish).

5. Ask students if they know what landforms are and if so, to give some examples. Then show some pictures found from the National Library of Congress, showing some famous and notable landmarks and explain how pioneers used these to mark parts of the trail, since they did not have atlases or maps as we do today. They had to be the mapmakers! Now, it’s time for the students to be their own mapmakers. The following activity will allow students to make their very own topographical map.

**Development**

1. Show the class a map of the Oregon Trail. 
   http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/upboverbib:@field%28NUMBER+@band%28upbover+maps42%29%29

   - Some famous places along the Oregon Trail include Independence, Missouri, Chimney Rock, Independence Rock, South Pass, Sublette’s Cutoff, Fort Bridger, Soda Springs, Fort Hall, Three Island Crossing, Fort Boise, Blue Mountains, The Dalles, Willamette Valley)

2. Show students an interactive website where they can see different parts of the trail and landmarks that pioneers used. http://www.historyglobe.com/ot/otmap1.htm. Have students use this and other resources (books, online sources, etc) to research the landmarks and important aspects of the geography of the Oregon Trail.

**Culmination**

1. Have students work together in groups and split up roles and divide work. Monitor and aid groups or individuals that may need assistance.
2. Students will then work specifically on one aspect of the trail according to the geography: Landforms, rivers, terrain, climate, etc.
3. Students will then have time to break up and research individually in the computer lab and write a short research paper on their topic of geography.
4. After the research is completed, students will use materials to create their aspects of the trail and work together to create Oregon Trail Model and use their research to create an accurate model.
Assessment

1. Have students orally present their portion of the Oregon Trail Model as groups and speak about the part they researched (i.e., mountains, rivers, etc). A summative assessment will be made upon a rubric assessing content accuracy, eye-contact, etc along with the research essay.

2. Formative Assessment will be used throughout based on participation (individually and in group) and large group discussions.
LESSON MODULE

DAY 3

Title: Hardships Along the Trail

Learning Goals:

Knowledge
- Students will learn the different hardships that travelers faced on the Oregon Trail
- Students will develop an understanding of what needed to be done on the trail in order to be safe.

Skills
- Students will learn to get information from primary sources such as diaries.
- Students will work actively in a group in order to research and present a topic.

Dispositions
- Students will read primary sources in order to learn about another person’s perspective.

National Council for the Social Studies Themes:

http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands

Time, Continuity, and Change

Studying the past makes it possible for us to understand the human story across time.

People, Places, and Environments

The study of people, places, and environments enables us to understand the relationship between human population and the physical world.

Production, Distribution, and Consumption

People have wants that often exceed the limited resources available to them.
Students will gather and analyze data, as well as use critical thinking skills to determine how best to deal with scarcity of resources.

**Materials Needed**

Copies of journal entries (appendix III)

Poster board

Markers/crayons/colored pencils

Access to computers

**Lesson Procedures:**

**Introduction**

1. Begin the lesson by asking students if they have ever kept a diary or a journal. Ask them questions like “what kinds of things do you write about?” and “if someone were to read your diary in 100 years, what kinds of things would they learn?”

2. Inform students that many people travelling along the Oregon Trail wrote diaries, and that these resources are great for learning about what they went through during the journey.

**Development:**

1. Ask the students what they think would have been a hardship when travelling on the Oregon Trail.

2. After they have time to brainstorm ideas, tell them that they are going to read parts of a journal that a man wrote while on the Oregon Trail.

3. Instruct students on their task, saying that they are going to get into groups to read the journal entries. They are then to create a list of things that the man talked about that they think would be considered a difficulty/hardship.
4. Allow students to also look at images from the Oregon Trail to help them get ideas (see Appendix I images 6-10)

5. Once they have their list, they are to pick topic to research as a group using information websites.

6. They are to take their information and write up a report, then put the information on a poster in an interesting way, and then present it to the class.

**Culmination:**

1. Group students together and hand out copies of the journal (see Appendix III).

2. Allow students time to work, walking around and answering questions as needed.

3. After the students are done with this process, have them present their information to the class.

**Assessment**

1. Make sure that the information presented by the students in the report and presentation is accurate and correctly derived from the journal.
LESSON MODULE

DAY 4

Title: Living in a Covered Wagon: Oregon Trail

Learning Goals:

Knowledge

- Students will develop an understanding of what it is like for the individuals who lived in covered wagons on the Oregon Trail.

- Students will begin to understand the key to packing a covered wagon and how important it was to make sure everything fit and that there were room for the pioneers.

Skills

- Students will participate in small group activity to discuss and come up with a list of things they would want in their covered wagon.

- Students will explore the different possibilities of how to pack their wagons in a large group activity titled "packing your covered wagon" using the recommend foods.

Dispositions

- Students will begin to develop an ability to evaluate some possibilities of what foods or items to put in their covered wagons by thinking about the past and how they had to use things around them to survive.

National Council For the Social Studies Themes: http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands

Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Time, Continuity, & Change: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy.

People, Places, and Environments: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Materials Needed:

Chart Paper

Markers

Copy of the foods the students can have in their covered wagon (http://www.laurasprairiehouse.com/crafts/packingyourcoveredwagon.html)
Pictures of each recommended foods for packing a wagon (Appendix IV images 1-5)

Picture of the inside and outside of a covered wagon (Appendix IV image 6)

Hand drawn covered wagon on a huge sheet of paper (example attached)

Book, "If you Traveled West in a Covered Wagon" by Ellen Levine (Grade Level: 3.9; Ages: 9-12)

(All images for this lesson can be found in Appendix I images 4-5 and Appendix IV)

**Lesson Procedures:**

1. First bring the class together as a large group and read the book, "If you Traveled West in a Covered Wagon" by Ellen Levine. Talk to the students about what the book was about. Ask questions that pertain to the book.
2. Tell the class they will be put into groups that you have already chosen. Before you put them into groups of approximately 3-4 (depending on how many students you have), tell them that at each table there will be a piece of paper and a couple markers and a copy of what they can have in their covered wagon. Tell them that as a group they need to decide what they want to pack in their covered wagon.
3. As a group each team cannot exceed the amount of 2,000 pounds in their covered wagon. They have to pretend that they are one family and they need to provide food for everyone. Have them go into their groups.

**Development:**

1. In their groups they will write down what they want to have in their covered wagons. In each group have one or two students be the ones to calculate how many pounds are in their covered wagon. Remember has to be 2,000 pounds or less. Remind them that it is okay if they don't have 2,000 pounds so everyone can feel equal no matter if they get that much or not.
2. After you give them about 10 - 15 minutes to talk with their groups and come up with a list, have each group share what they decided to put in their covered wagon to survive.

**Culmination:**

1. Then, bring it to a large group discussion and here is where you need the hand drawn inside view of the covered wagon and pictures of the recommended foods. (I would laminate these so I can use it year round and attach a magnet to the back of everything so you can use it on a whiteboard).
2. As a large group I would talk to the students about what types of things they wanted in their covered wagons and then each time we would come up with a type of food, I would have them "pack" it on the large covered wagon on the board.

**Assessment:**

1. To finish the lesson I would ask a question to assess the students on what they had learned from the book and also from the lesson.
2. I would ask a question such as, why the students think these types of things were packed in the covered wagons by the pioneers.
3. Also, "Is it important on how they packed the covered wagon to make sure everything was inside?"
APPENDIX I:
IMAGES AND GRAPHIC MATERIAL FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1: Advertisement
A poster that alerted many to inexpensive land for sale in Iowa and Nebraska.
1. **Song**

A song sheet written about moving west in the 1800s.

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**TO THE WEST!**

To the west! to the west! to the land of the free,
Where the mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea,
Where a man is a man if he is willing to toil,
And the humblest may gather the fruits of the soil,
Where children are blessings, and he who hath most
Has all to his fortune, and riches to boast;
Where the young may exert, and the aged may rest,
Away, far away, to the land of the west.

To the west! to the west! to the land of the free,
Where the mighty Missouri rolls down to the sea,
Where the young may exert and the aged may rest,
Away, far away, to the land of the west!

To the west! to the west! where the rivers that flow,
Run thousands of miles, sparkling out as they go,
Where the green waving forests shall echo our call,
As wide as old England, and free to us all!
Where the prairies, like sea where the billows have roll'd
Are broad as the kingdoms and empires of old;
And the lakes are oceans in storms or in rest—
Away, far away, to land of the west!

To the west, to the west, etc.

To the west, to the west, there is wealth to be won;
A forest to clear is the work to be done;
We'll try it—we'll do it—and never despair,
While there's light in the sunshine, or life in the air.
The bold independence that labor shall buy,
Shall strengthen our hearts, and forbid us to sigh;
Away, far away, let us hope for the best!
For a home is a home, in the land of the west!

To the west, to the west, etc.

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H. DE MARSSAN, Publisher,
64 Chatham Street, New-York.
2: Advertisement
An advertisement to move west by traveling the railroad.
4. Image
Outside of a covered wagon image to be used for Day 4 lesson
5. Image
Inside of a covered wagon image to be used for Day 4 lesson
6: Image

Cherokee Pass in the Rocky Mountains
North Platte River
8: Image

A trail leading down to the Deschutes River
9: Image

Sheep herder on the trail.
View of the trail in Nebraska
APPENDIX II

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WEBLIOGRAPHY
OF RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Bibliography of Children's Literature


WEBLIOGRAPHY OF ONLINE RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Children’s Literature: Kathleen Karr’s Teaching Guide

This website includes two children’s books about the Oregon Trail and lessons to go with them including background information, etc.

http://www.childrenslib.com/childrenslib/tm_karr_pettycoat.html

The Oregon Trail: A Pathfinder for 4th Grade

A great teacher resource that includes lessons on the Oregon Trail as well as websites for information.

http://nb.wsd.wednet.edu/lmc/pathfinders/Oregon_trail_pathfinder.htm#Books

Library of Congress: Trails to Utah and the Pacific, Diaries and Letters 1846-1869

This link leads to a collection of primary sources including letters and journals written by people who travelled the Oregon Trail.

A Link to a map of the Oregon Trail found on the Library of Congress.

The Oregon Trail: 1843 Map.

This is a map of the Oregon Trail with how the United States looked then compared to how it looks now.

Covered Wagons, Bumpy Trails Book

This is a great website to activity ideas that are based around this book "Covered Wagons, Bumpy Trails". You also have the opportunity to add any lessons you might have with the book to the website as well!

Oregon Trail Homepage

This website contains lots of great information on the Oregon Trail. There are links to general information, historical landmarks, and even some fun facts.

Daily Life Along the Trail

This website gives a lot of information about what people wore along the trail as well as what they ate.

Covered Wagon

This is a presentation that teachers can use in order to teach their students about the Oregon Trail, specifically the covered wagons.

Pack your own covered wagon:

This website has a great list of things that most pioneers had on their covered wagons that you can print off for Day 4 of the lessons. It also has a great list of the recommended items or foods that they had in their covered wagons as well.
FOR STUDENTS

Gain more knowledge!

This website is a great website to gain more information about the history of the covered wagons that may not get touched upon when learning about them.


Oregon Trail ThinkQuest

This thinkquest is all about the Oregon Trail!

http://library.thinkquest.org/6400/

Just For Kids: Trail Kids

A website that goes over the facts and information about the Oregon Trail from the perspective of children. It also includes quotes from kids who travelled the trail.

http://www.blm.gov/or/oregontrail/education-kids-trail.php

Westward, Ho!

An interactive worksheet or “cyberhunt” pertaining to the Oregon Trail.

http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/westwardho.htm

What Were Their Lives Likes on the Trail?

This website provides kid-friendly information about that daily lives of people on the trail.

http://library.thinkquest.org/6400/lives.htm

Trails to the West

An fun, interactive game where you have to answer questions about the Oregon Trail in order to complete the map of the United States.

http://www.ballard-tighe.com/eaweb/interactiveonline/activities/ea5_3.swf

Fantastic Facts About the Oregon Trail

This site has many different weird and interesting facts about the Oregon Trail.

http://www.america101.us/trail/Facts.html

Oregon Trail Ecosystems
A hands-on activity where students will study the Oregon Trail and learn about many different ecosystems along the way.


**The Settlers Trail**

This link goes to a free web-based game where you can create your own team to travel along the Oregon Trail!

http://www.arcadeweb.com/aj/336/3830/1579KMG/?ce_cid=0014Zf0000002sRo5x18Z7yoft0000

**Pioneer Music**

This website contains a list of songs that were commonly sung for entertainment on the Oregon Trail. Click on the songs to see the lyrics!

http://library.thinkquest.org/6400/toys.htm
APPENDIX III

JOURNALS FROM LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1: Journal

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/upbover:@field(DOCID+@lit(dia1521))

Churchill, Stillman Diary, 1849 (vol 1)

March 27, 1849

Left Lowell at 8. A M. arrived at Lynn 10½ A M. The Sagamore Comp were invited to partake of a Collation at 1.P.M. a free gift by the Ladies. In the Evening we had a special gathering with the Ladies spiced with dancing {illegible} at Sagamore Hall; lodged at Lynn Hotell, weather cold and rainy

May 5, 1849

Rainy this morning, it also continued to rain without cessation through the day. owing to which the company to procede on their journey, and remained in Camp inactive

May 9, 1849

Weather fine; we awoke at the dawn of day, eate our breakfast and again resumed our journey, we mooved on 2½ miles when our Mules became unmanagible and so entangled that we were obliged to unharness them all and tie them to trees. after getting them all harnesed again but one and while engaged trying to unhitch the last he pitched at us with such fury, that instead of ^{begin inserted text}striking us{end inserted text} he struck on his head and instantly broke his neck; we were then compelled to harnes one of the spare mules when we again resumed our journey, traveled 4½ miles further and camped near a small strean on the Prairie distance of travel this day 12 miles

May 16, 1849

Fair to day; the road to day very rough, about 11. o clock we came to a large creek which took us several hours to cross. here the company were obliged to lower the waggons down the first bank, and on the oposite shore we had 45 men engaged in hawling each team and waggon up the bank, we mooved on 2 miles farther and camped

May 23, 1849

Weather rany accompanied with the most terific lightning and heavyest thunder I ever witnessed clear again at 10, oclock left camp at 1 P M roads slippery

June 3, 1849

Weather fair the company are engaged to day in repairing their wagons overhauling and equalizeing the loads acording to the strenght of the mules as some of them have nearly exhausted their s strength some of the Co b{begin inserted text}e{end inserted text}longing to the WolveRine Rangers visited us to day were all well except a few cases of Cholera in its most soothing f forms no traveling to day
32 June

current with some cat fish in it; two companies are camped here they intend uniting for the safety of each other as there is a report in circulation that the Indians are very troublesome in this vicinity; Dr. Page, and Mr Wilkins went a fishing and caught 3 beautiful cat fish, which made us all an excellent supper, traveled about 11en miles and camped on the blue; roads good distance 20. miles to day

34 June

that 300 pawnees had been hovering around or near the Fort and yesterday he passed them on the road and advised us to wear our side arms they were at war and waiting for a tribe of Chienns & were well armed but we did not see them his es escort consisted of 8 men bound for Fort Leavenworth we traveled to day in company with some western men the Maj a{begin inserted text}d{end inserted text} vised us not to admit any indians near our camp nor allow any one but the captain to communicate with them the pawnees had robed 2 emigrant wagons & to day several companies of dragoons are in pursuit of them the road to day has been very good we reached the Platte at 6½ P M soon after we picketed out our mules there came up a terrible thunder storm which continued, til morning the bo bottom is very large and beautiful & covered with grass distance 27 miles to day

June

we thought best to camp for the night on the river; grass good; the masquitoes were very thick and troublesom as they make considerable of an inscision with their proboscis causing some itching and considerable pain distance 18 miles
APPENDIX IV

NON LIBRARY OF CONGRESS IMAGES

1: Image

Map of the Oregon Trail
Bacon used for Day 4 lesson when packing your covered wagon
Image
Coffee used for the Day 4 lesson when packing your covered wagon
4. **Image**
Flour image to be used for Day 4 lesson when packing your covered wagon
5. Image
Rice image to be used for Day 4 lesson when packing your covered wagon
6. **Image**
Sugar image to be used for Day 4 lesson when packing your covered wagon
7. Image
Design of a covered wagon image to be used for Day 4 lesson when packing your covered wagon to hand draw the outline of it