

**Daily Life on the Oregon-California Trail
4th Grade**

**Developed for
Library of Congress Midwest Region
“It’s Elementary: Teaching with Primary Sources” 2011**

**By Rochelle Rey
Pauline South Intermediate School, USD 437, Wakarusa**

Overview:

This lesson is designed to teach what daily life was like for people traveling the Oregon-California Trail. Students will learn the hardships faced by travelers and what supplies were necessary for the trip. Students will view pictures and read journal entries written by people traveling the trail during the late 1800s and then create their own journal entry as if they were traveling on the trail.

Standards:

Kansas History

Benchmark 1, Indicator 6: The student describes life on the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails (e.g. interactions between different cultural groups, hardships such as lack of water, mountains, and rivers to cross, weather, need for medical care, size of wagon.)

Common Core Reading

RI.4.3. The student will explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

RI.4.6. The student will compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.

Common Core Writing

W.4.3.b. The student will write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

b. The student will use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

Objectives

Content:

- The students will be able to identify hardships encountered and supplies needed while traveling the Oregon-California Trail.
- The students will be able to describe what daily life was like for people traveling on the Oregon-California Trail.

Skills:

- The students will identify at least three hardships encountered by pioneers on the Oregon-California trail.
- The students will identify at least three supplies needed by people traveling on the Oregon-California trail.
- The students will explain at least three aspects of daily life on the Oregon-California trail.

Essential Question:

- Why was traveling on the Oregon-California trail difficult?

Resource Table:

Image	Description	Citation	URL
<p><i>Wolf River Ford, Kansas Territory</i></p> 	<p><i>Wolf River Ford, Kansas Territory</i>-An 1859 view of Wolf River Ford in Doniphan County, Kansas Territory, photographed by the Bierstadt Bros., Photographers, of New Bedford, Massachusetts. This crossing was on the Oregon Trail.</p>	<p>Kansas Historical Society Kansas Memory</p>	<p>http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/90239</p>
<p>A Pioneer Family</p> 	<p>Weary pioneers rest in front of two Conestoga wagons on a plain with mountains in the background. Family includes an adult male, 3 adult females, and 4 children. Date 1870?</p>	<p>Denver Public Library Digital Collections</p>	<p>http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hawp:@field(NUMBER+@band(codhawp+10011929))</p>
<p><i>Across the Plains In 1844</i> By Catherine Sager Pringle</p>	<p>Text Document of a journal written while traveling the Oregon Trail with her family.</p>	<p>Copyright c. 2011 by Boettcher/Trinklein Inc</p>	<p>http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/00.ar.sager1.html</p>
<p><i>Diary of James Akin, Jr</i></p>	<p>Text Document of a journal written while traveling the Oregon Trail.</p>	<p>Copyright c. 2011 by Boettcher/Trinklein Inc</p>	<p>http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/00.ar.akin.html</p>

Day 1:

1. Before starting the lesson, the teacher will need to activate prior knowledge about the Oregon Trail (See “For the Teacher”.)
2. Show the students the photo taken at **Wolf River Ford, Kansas Territory**.
3. Tell the students this is a photo taken of the Oregon Trail in Kansas.
4. Ask the students the following series of questions to help the students evaluate the primary source.
 - a. When do you think the following photo was taken?
 - b. Who do you think took the photo?
 - c. Why do you think the person took the photo?
 - d. What do you see in the photo?
 - e. Is that what you expect to see at the Oregon Trail? Why?
5. Show the students the photo **A Pioneer Family**. Explain to the students this is a pioneer family headed west.
6. Ask the students the series of questions:
 - a. When do you think the following photo was taken?
 - b. Who do you think took the photo?
 - c. Why do you think the person took the photo?
 - d. What do you see in the photo?
 - e. Is that what you expect to see at the Oregon Trail? Why?
 - f. Do you think this was typical for a family traveling along the trail?
 - g. What supplies did this family bring on their trip? Why do you think they chose those supplies?
7. Tell the students they are going to look at an excerpt from a journal of a girl who traveled along the Oregon Trail with her family. Distribute copies of **Across the Plains In 1844 By Catherine Sager Pringle** journal.
8. Have students use two colors of highlighter/colored pencil. The students will use one color to mark any hardships the group encountered on the trail and the other color will be used to mark any interesting aspects of their daily life.
9. Choral read the journal entry with the students stopping at the end of each paragraph to mark the passages.
10. Have a class discussion the passage and daily life as represented in this journal. Ask the students if they would like to be pioneer during this time period and what they think happened to the children after the end of the journal.
11. Have the students use information from the journals to make a class list of the hardships encountered by this family.
12. Tell the children they will read another journal from a man who traveled the trail herding cattle and they will be looking for his hardships and his daily life. They will be marking both hardships and daily life with the colored pencils.
13. Pass out the second journal **Diary of James Akin, Jr.**
14. Have the students read the excerpt independently and mark the hardships and daily life.

15. After reading the passage, pair the students to discuss the passage and what they marked as hardships and daily life.
16. Conduct a class discussion to compare daily life as depicted in *Diary of James Akin, Jr.* with *Across the Plains In 1844* By Catherine Sager Pringle.
17. Add to the list of hardships anything that was not seen in the first journal.
18. As an assessment, the students will create their own journal entry as if they were traveling the Oregon Trail. They will need to write about what they brought on the journey. They will need to encounter at least three hardships along the way and explain at least three aspects of their daily lives. Students should also include the supplies they think were needed on the trail.

Assessment

1. The students will be assessed based on their personal journal entries. Students will need to include three hardships encountered, three aspects of daily life, and supplies needed on the trail.

For the Teacher:

- This lesson is meant to be taught after the students have had an introduction to the Oregon-California Trail. This can be done by using the Fourth Grade *Read Kansas!* Lessons I-6 “Trade and Migration on the Overland Trails” and I-7 “Experiencing the Trails” produced by the Kansas State Historical Society.
- For struggling students, the second journal entry can be read in small groups.
- For higher students, the full text journal entries are available on line at <http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/Oregontrail.html> along with journals from other individuals.

Answer Key

Some hardships experienced along the trail: lack of food and water; bad weather; disease; rough roads; wagons breaking down; animals getting sick and wearing out; death; crossing rivers; crossing mountain ranges; Native American encounters; wildlife; etc.

Daily life on the trail: hunt for food; ride in the wagon; walk; tend to animals; take care of sick/injured; gather wood or buffalo chips for fire; etc.

Supplies needed on the trail: wagon; horse or other animals to pull the wagon; as much food as can be carried; clothes; medical supplies; cooking supplies; etc.

ACROSS THE PLAINS IN 1844 BY CATHERINE SAGER PRINGLE

My father was one of the restless ones who are not content to remain in one place long at a time. Late in the fall of 1838 we emigrated from Ohio to Missouri. Our first halting place was on Green River, but the next year we took a farm in Platte County. He engaged in farming and blacksmithing, and had a wide reputation for ingenuity. Anything they needed, made or mended, sought his shop. In 1843, Dr. Whitman came to Missouri. ... Immigration was the theme all winter, and we decided to start for Oregon. Late in 1843 father sold his property and moved near St. Joseph, and in April, 1844, we started across the plains. The first encampments were a great pleasure to us children. We were five girls and two boys, ranging from the girl baby to be born on the way to the oldest boy, hardly old enough to be any help.

... We waited several days at the Missouri River. Many friends came that far to see the emigrants start on their long journey, and there was much sadness at the parting, and a sorrowful company crossed the Missouri that bright spring morning. The motion of the wagon made us all sick, and it was weeks before we got used to the seasick motion. Rain came down and required us to tie down the wagon covers, and so increased our sickness by confining the air we breathed.

... This was divided into companies, and we were in that commanded by William Shaw. Soon after starting Indians raided our camp one night and drove off a number of cattle. They were pursued, but never recovered.

Soon everything went smooth and our train made steady headway. The weather was fine and we enjoyed the journey pleasantly. There were several musical instruments among the emigrants...

... We had one wagon, two steady yoke of old cattle, and several of young and not well-broken ones. Father was no ox driver, and had trouble with these until one day he called on Captain Shaw for assistance. ...

Reaching the buffalo country, our father would get some one to drive his team and start on the hunt, for he was enthusiastic in his love of such sport. He not only killed the great bison, but often brought home on his shoulder the timid antelope ... Soon after crossing South Platte the unwieldy oxen ran on a bank and overturned the wagon, greatly injuring our mother. She lay long insensible in the tent put up for the occasion.

August 1st we nooned in a beautiful grove on the north side of the Platte. We had by this time got used to climbing in and out of the wagon when in motion. When performing this feat that afternoon my dress caught on an axle helve and I was thrown under the wagon wheel, which passed over and badly crushed my limb before father could stop the team. He picked me up and saw the extent of the injury when the injured limb hung dangling in the air.

... In a broken voice he exclaimed: "My dear child, your leg is broken all to pieces!" The news soon spread along the train and a halt was called. A surgeon was found and the limb set; then we pushed on the same night to Laramie, where we arrived soon after dark. This accident confined me to the wagon the remainder of the long journey.

After Laramie we entered the great American desert, which was hard on the teams. Sickness became common. Father and the boys were all sick, and we were dependent for a driver on the Dutch doctor who set my leg. He offered his services and was employed, but though an excellent surgeon, he knew little about driving oxen. Some of them often had to rise from their sick beds to wade streams and get the oxen safely across. One day four buffalo ran between our wagon and the one behind. Though feeble, father seized his gun and gave chase to them. This imprudent act prostrated him again, and it soon became apparent that his days were numbered. He was fully conscious of the fact, but could not be reconciled to the thought of leaving his large and helpless family in such precarious circumstances. ... His wife was ill, the children small, and one likely to be a cripple. They had no relatives near, and a long journey lay before them. In piteous tones he begged the Captain to take charge of them and see them through. This he stoutly promised. Father was buried the next day on the banks of Green River. His coffin was made of two troughs dug out of the body of a tree....

Mother planned to get to Whitman's and winter there, but she was rapidly failing under her sorrows. The nights and mornings were very cold, and she took cold from the exposure unavoidably. With camp fever and a sore mouth, she fought bravely against fate for the sake of her children, but she was taken delirious soon after reaching Fort Bridger, and was bed-fast. Travelling in this condition over a road clouded with dust, she suffered intensely... until at last she became unconscious. Her babe was cared for by the women of the train. Those kind-hearted women would also come in at night and wash the dust from the mother's face and otherwise make her comfortable. We travelled a rough road the day she died, and she moaned fearfully all the time... her last words were, "Oh, Henry! If you only knew how we have suffered." The tent was set up, the corpse laid out, and next morning we took the last look at our mother's face. The grave was near the road; willow brush was laid in the bottom and covered the body, the earth filled in -- then the train moved on.

Her name was cut on a headboard, and that was all that could be done. So in twenty-six days we became orphans. Seven children of us, the oldest fourteen and the youngest a babe. A few days before her death, finding herself in possession of her faculties and fully aware of the coming end, she had taken an affectionate farewell of her children and charged the doctor to take care of us. She made the same request of Captain Shaw. ...

At Snake River they lay by to make our wagon into a cart, as our team was wearing out. Into this was loaded what was necessary. Some things were sold and some left on the plains. The last of September we arrived at Grande Ronde, where one of my sister's clothes caught fire, and she would have burned to death only that the German doctor, at the cost of burning his hands, saved her. ...

We purchased of the Indians the first potatoes we had eaten since we started on our long and sad journey. October 17th we started for our destination, leaving the baby very sick, with doubts of its recovery. Mrs. Shaw took an affectionate leave of us all, and stood looking after us as long as we were in sight. Speaking of it in later years, she said she never saw a more pitiful sight than that cartful of orphans going to find a home among strangers...

<http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/00.ar.sager1.html>

Diary of James Akin, Jr (1852)

Thursday, April 15, 1852 - First day crossed Fish Creek, three-fourths of a mile; roads pretty good; plenty of water and wood.

Friday, April 16, 1852 - Rained until noon; started and came in Salem; left Salem at 3 O'clock; traveled 6 miles; plenty of wood; not much water....

Wednesday, April 21, 1852 - Bad roads; travel 16 miles; cold weather passed Eddyville about noon; had place to camp; plenty wood and water....

Saturday, April 24, -- Traveled 12 miles; roads hilly and rough; cloudy weather; passed Knoxville; crossed White Breast Creek and camped on the bank; bought hay....

Friday, April 30 - Start at 9 o'clock and travel 3 miles and pass Wintersette; roads very good; windy, cold day; stop and camp 1 mile west of Wintersette; camp in a deep hollow; good place to camp; 47 wagons on the same ground.

Saturday, May 1, Start early; travel 20 miles; very good roads; camp in the prairie; plenty of water; carry wood three-quarters of a mile; herd cattle till 9 o'clock.

Sunday, May 2, - Very cold, windy morning; start about noon and travel 8 miles; camp in the prairie and haul wood with us; not much grass; plenty of water; rains at night....

Friday, May 7, - Start early and travel two and a half miles to the creek and wait 4 hours to cross, and the boat sank; good roads in the prairie; camp in the prairie; plenty of water and grass no wood....

Tuesday, May 11, - Beautiful day; ferry boat sunk, 2 or 3 drowned, herd cattle; plenty grass; flour \$16 per barrel.

Wednesday, May 12, - Camped in the same place; rains in the evening. A man killed by the wagon running over him. Teams coming in all the time....

Friday, May 14, - Camped in the same place; boat sunk; bought flour at \$16 per barrel; beautiful day; pack up the wagons. ...

Monday, May 17, - Start early and go to the river, but could not get to cross; camp here and drive the cattle back about 2 miles to grass.

Tuesday, May 18, - Commence crossing in the morning and cross nearly all day; very windy; cross till midnight; get all the cattle across except 10 yoke....

Friday, May 28, -- Start early; travel 18 miles; come to the buffalo range; sandy roads; camp in the prairie; plenty grass; no wood; water scarce....

Wednesday, June 2 - Travel 20 miles; very hot, calm day; roads very dusty; cross Elm and Buffalo Creeks; camp; not much grass; drive cattle two miles to water; rainy, windy night. Grand Island.

Thursday, June 3, --Travel 18 miles; muddy roads; cool day; came to Platte River again; saw 5 graves; camp near Platte; no wood - some buffalo chips; come to alkali....

Monday, June 7, -- Travel 14 miles; crossed Carrion Creek; passed the last timber for 200 miles; took a buffalo hunt and wounded one; camp in a good place, near the river; buffalo chips....

Tuesday, June 15, -- Laid by all day on account of sickness; not much grass; Caleb Richey and his company overtook us; plenty water, not much chips.

Wednesday, June 16 - Louise Richey died at 2 o'clock in the morning; traveled 15 miles; good roads; pleasant weather; camp on Platte; not much grass....

Saturday, July 3 - Travel 18 miles up Sweet Water. This river is about 40 feet wide. Rattle Snake Mountains on the north side; Snake Indians; camp; not much grass

Sunday, July 4 - Laid by all day to let cattle rest; cold and windy day and night; not much grass; plenty sage brush for use; many teams pass us; wrote a letter....

Tuesday, July 6 - Laid by all day; good grass; sage brush, great many Indians come and camp within two miles of us; trade some with us....

Tuesday, July 13 - Camp in the same place and let the cattle rest; no more water for 40 miles ahead....

Sunday, July 18, -- Lay by all day; good grass near camp; sold an ox and bought a cow and an ox; Gillhams left the company; some rain and hail up the creek....

Friday, July 23, -- Travel 16 miles; very bad roads; cross Thomas' Ford on the bridge; paid \$1.00 per wagon; camp on Bear River; good grass; mosquitoes bad; overtook Caleb Richey....

Tuesday, July 27, -- Left Bear River; travel 18 miles; very good, dusty roads, passed the forks of Oregon and California roads; plenty water; good place to camp....

Friday, July 30, -- Travel 17 miles; very rough and dusty roads; shower in the evening; camp on the creek; plenty grass wood and water; no wagons in sight today....

Sunday, August 8, -- Laid by all-day; very good grass; great many camped around; water ver scarce; great many dead cattle on this creek....

Tuesday, August 10, -- Travel 12 miles; very rough and dusty roads; grass scarce; camp on Second Rock Creek; some grass, water and wood plenty; mother taken sick in the evening....

Sunday, August 22 -- Mother taken worse in the morning and died about 9 o'clock in the evening. We are now about 30 miles below Salmon Falls on the north side of Snake River.

Monday, August 23, -- Mother was buried about 10 o'clock in the morning about 200 yards above the crossing of the river. Travel eight miles to a spring.

Tuesday, August 24 - Lay by 'till noon; Moses Rhodes died in the morning. Travel 11 miles; good roads; camp on Dry Creek; water scarce; grass plenty....

Thursday, September 9 -- Lay by all day on account of sickness; company all left except Uncle Stewart and Caleb; not much grass; wood and water plenty; Eliza Ann Richey died at 9 o'clock p.m....

Thursday, September 16, -- Lost nine of our cattle; hunt for them all day and find them just at sunset; considerable sickness in our company.

Friday, September 17, -- Travel 15 miles; cross the Blue Mountains and Grande Ronde River; roughest roads we have every had; travel through pine timber all-day; camp....

Tuesday, September, 28 - Start at 3 o'clock a.m.; travel nine miles to Willow Creek; water scarce; not much grass; wood plenty....

Friday, October 15, -- Reach the Cascades about 2 o'clock in the evening; everyone sick.

This is the last entry in the diary kept by James Akin, Jr.

Mrs. Nancy Hanson tells me that we paid the Indians who brought us down in the canoe \$20 in money and our big tent.

Our little sister, Mary Ann Akin, died at the Cascades and was buried there. We were at the Cascades about a week waiting for the steamboat to bring us down to Portland. Our father died two weeks after we reached Portland.

<http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/00.ar.akin.html>