

**Learning Objectives**

- 1) Realize that in the 1800's the United States acquired a great deal of land. After Thomas Jefferson increased the size of the country by obtaining the Louisiana Territory from the French, politicians began to speak of the country's "Manifest Destiny," which meant that it was the predetermination of the United States to cover the land from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. The idea of Manifest Destiny sparked a wave of American pioneers to explore and claim the west before England could do so.
- 2) Recognize that the migration west by way of the Oregon Trail involved some 500,000 Americans during the 1840's to the 1860's. Before the 1840's, few people journeyed west, those who did, were mainly missionaries and fur traders.
- 3) Understand that those who migrated west on the Oregon Trail did so for many reasons: adventure, religious freedom, farmland, and fortune. Also, understand that people from many different backgrounds made the trek west, they included farmers, housewives, prospectors, storekeepers, and even criminals.
- 4) Know that the immigrants started their journey in Independence, Missouri and had many destinations. The Oregon Trail did not only lead to the Oregon Country, but it also broke off and lead south to other destinations like Utah and California.
- 5) Understand that the migration west was very long and slow. The trail was 2000 miles long and the wagon trains moved only at about two miles an hour. The immigrants could only cover about twenty miles a day; consequently the journey lasted about five months.
- 6) Know that the immigrants had to leave Independence, Missouri in the spring in order to make it to their destination without encountering cold weather. However, many immigrants found themselves caught in winter conditions in the mountain ranges of the West. Leaving in the spring also assured the immigrants that there would be enough grass along the trail to help feed their livestock.
- 7) Realize that the journey to the Oregon country was extremely difficult and dangerous. There were violent thunderstorms in the prairies, rattlesnakes in the desert areas, and portions of the trip where food and water were scarce. Many times throughout the trip the pioneers had to caulk

their wagons and traverse the rivers or find a way around them, both choices were potentially dangerous.

- 8) Understand that many of the pioneers using the Oregon Trail faced death. Thousands died of cholera, others drowned while crossing rivers, and some even died of rattlesnake bites.
- 9) Recognize that since the trip west was very difficult, the immigrants had to be prepared. Many bought handbooks, that told them what and how many supplies to bring. Immigrants realized that only the bare necessities could be taken. The wagons and handcarts had to be light so the oxen, horses, or mules could pull them throughout the journey. Items brought on the trip, included food, tools, cooking utensils, and guns and ammunition for hunting and defense.
- 10) Realize that every immigrant had to pull his or her own weight, because there was always work to be done along the trail. Adults had to hunt, cook, guard the campsites, and fix wagons. Children were also expected to do chores, which included collecting firewood and tending the livestock.
- 11) Understand the role that landmarks and forts played in the journey. Landmarks, like Chimney Rock, allowed the immigrants to gauge, with the aide of their handbooks, the distance they had traveled and the distance they still had to cover. Forts were places where the immigrants could stock up supplies and gain information about the trail ahead.
- 12) Realize that the immigrants were not the first people to inhabit the land in the West. Indians were already present when the Americans arrived. At first, the Indians were helpful to the migrants, but they soon became angry with the white people. The immigrants destroyed the herds of buffalo, which were an important source of food and clothing. The Americans also brought diseases, which killed huge numbers of Indians, and broke many treaties by forcing the Indians off their land.

**Suggested Activities**

- 1) Before viewing the video:
  - a) Ask students what they know about the Oregon Trail. What was the reason for people starting along the trail? Who took the Oregon Trail? Was it over a long period of time? Where did it start and where did it finish? What happened along the way? Watch the video to find out. Encourage students to take notes.

- 2) After viewing the video:
  - a) See how many of the above questions can now be answered. Discuss the kinds of things that were taken on the trip and what happened to some of them along the way.
  - b) Tell the students to pretend that they are taking a trip along the Oregon Trail in 1845. Based on what they have observed, have the class make a list of the things they should bring. The students must realize that there is limited space and the wagons must be light enough to float across rivers.
  - c) Get a copy of a blank map of the United States with the states outlined. Pause the video at the map of the Oregon Trail and trace the original route on an up-to-date map. Now mark the present-day cities and highways along the trail on the blank maps. Remember that when the pioneers traveled the Oregon Trail it was mostly wilderness. What large cities would pioneers have passed through if they had existed then? Did they travel along any of today's major highways?

**Vocabulary**

**Caulk** — To make the spaces between the boards of the wagon watertight by filling them with a watertight material

**Cholera** — Any of many types of diseases that are marked by diarrhea and severe vomiting

**Handcart** — A cart pushed by the hand

**Landmark** — A noticeable object on the land that identifies a place or helps direct people where to go

**Manifest Destiny** — The 19<sup>th</sup> century idea that U.S. expansion to the Pacific was inevitable

**Treaty** — An agreement between two parties

