

# ***Why did the Pioneers Move West?***

**Grade:** Upper Elementary/Middle School

**Purpose/Objective:** Students will understand the reasons why the pioneers moved west. Students will also understand the preparations pioneers made to move west.

**Lesson Plan:**

[Use Teacher Resource Information: Life on the Trail, Supplies for the Oregon Trail Journey, Westward Expansion Dates]

1. Introduction: Ask the students what they may already know about the pioneers. Who were they? Where did they come from? What did they do? What other details do they know about the pioneers? Write their answers on the board. Explain that they are going to be learning about who the pioneers were. First, you will cover why the pioneers moved west and the preparations that they had to make.
2. Discussion/Journal Entry:
  - a. Either as a discussion or daily journal entry, ask the students if anyone has ever moved? Why did you and your family move? What was it like moving? What did you have to do to get ready? Did you have any restrictions on what you could or couldn't bring? What were they? Did you like moving? Why or why not? What was the hardest part about moving?
  - b. Explain that the pioneers came west for a variety reasons. Explain those reasons and discuss them as a class. Compare and contrast the reasons pioneers went west with why some students moved and the feelings associated with moving.
3. Preparations to go west took coordination and time. Explain that families would go to "jumping off" cities to load their supplies in wagons and join a wagon train. Explain what the pioneers needed and how they began their journey.
4. Activity 1:
  - a. Have the students complete the Handcarts West! Worksheet. Explain that some pioneers coming to Utah used handcarts instead of wagons. Since this activity deals with weights, bring in common weight items so students can get an idea of what 5 pounds, 10 pounds, 2 pounds, etc. is.
  - b. After students have completed the worksheet, you may want to discuss it as a class, or have students break into small groups to discuss their answers. Ask the class if they thought 15-20 pounds was enough for them to take everything that they wanted.
5. Activity 2: (Map)
  - a. Have students create a map of a westward trail. They should consult a textbook and other maps to locate towns, mountains, trails west, and

state/territory boundaries (of the time period). Make sure students include a compass and a key.

- b. Other possibilities: identify where Native American tribes lived, mining towns, and railroads (later date). Students may want to compare their map with current state maps to see how major roads and cities compare to the westward migration trails of the past.

6. Activity 3:

- a. Have students make a list of their 10 most prized possessions.
- b. Compare that list with what the pioneer children would have prized and what they actually could have taken with them.

7. Post Discussion: Explain that it took a lot of effort to come across the plains to the west, especially before the railroad and cars. Ask students if they have ever been back east. How did they get there? Plane? How long did that take? Car or bus? How long did that take? Explain that it would take 4-6 months to go the 2,000 miles.

[Follow up with the lesson *Life on the Trail*]

**Websites:**

The Oregon Trail

<http://www.isu.edu/%7Etrnmich/Oregontrail.html>

This website provides brief overview material on the Oregon Trail, with pictures and interesting facts.

The Mormon Trail

<http://www.lds.org/gospellibrary/pioneer/pioneerstory.htm>

This website, produced by the LDS Church, follows the Mormon Trail to Salt Lake City. There are journal accounts from pioneers on the trail associated with various locations.

The Oregon Trail Center

<http://www.oregontrailcenter.org/index.html>

Search the Historical Trails section for information regarding the Oregon Trail, journal entry excerpts, and local trail landmarks. A links section also offers various links to information regarding the Oregon Trail.

**Standards:** SS 4.1.2, 4.2.1, 5.2.2, 7.2.3, 8.7.1

**Use in Classroom:** Writing, Geography (Maps), Writing

## Handcarts West!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Imagine that you are heading West! You are not going to be going in a wagon, however, you will be going in a handcart. Handcarts were less expensive than wagons, but you couldn't take as much stuff either. Decide what you are going to take with you. List the items that you would take in your handcart below and explain why you are taking each item, then answer the remaining questions.

**What will I take with me? Why am I taking each item?**

1. Estimate how much each item you are taking weighs. Write the weight next to the item above.
2. How much do all of your items weigh together?
3. If you could only bring 15-20 pounds, would you be able to take every item on your list? If you answered yes, you are ready to go! If you answered no, keep going.
4. List the items that you will leave behind.
  
5. Why did you choose to leave behind the items you listed in number 4?