Westward Ho: The Difficulties of Emigrants Moving West

Learn about the difficulties travelers encountered when emigrating west in the 19th Century.

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Grade Level: 4-5
Duration: 2-3 class periods

National Geography Standards
ELEMENT ONE: THE WORLD IN SPATIAL TERMS
1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.

ELEMENT FIVE: ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY
15. How physical systems affect human systems.

ELEMENT SIX: THE USES OF GEOGRAPHY
17. How to apply geography to interpret the past.

Arizona Geography Standards
Grade 4
Strand 4 Geography
Concept 6 Geographic Applications
PO 1 Describe the impact of geographic features (rivers, mountains, resources, deserts, climate) on migration and the location of human activities (e.g., exploration, mining, transportation routes, settlement patterns).

Grade 5
Strand 4 Geography
Concept 1 The World in Spatial Terms
PO 3 Identify the location of significant geographic features (i.e., Continental Divide, Great Salt Lake, Appalachians, Rockies, Mississippi River, Great Lakes, Cascades, Sierra Nevada, Rio Grande) on a physical or political map.

Concept 4 Human Systems
PO 2 Explain the effects of human migration on places (e.g., economic, cultural, environmental, political).

Concept 6 Geographic Applications
PO 1 Describe how geographic features influenced events in the past (e.g., Original Thirteen Colonies, Great Plains, Pacific Northwest).

Other Arizona Standards
Social Studies
Grade 5
Strand 1 American History
Concept 5: Westward Expansion
PO 3. Identify major westward migration routes of the 19th Century.

ELA Common Core Standards
Reading
Literature
Key Ideas and Details
4.RL.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).

5.RL.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
4.RL.10 and 5.RL.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band [independently-grade 5] proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Informational Text
Key Ideas and Details
4.RI.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.

Craft and Structure
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5.RI.4 Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a grade 5 topic or subject area.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
4.RI.7 Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.
5.RI.8 Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity
4.RI.10 and 5.RI.10 By the end of year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 4–5 text complexity band proficiently [independently-grade5] with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Writing Production and Distribution of Writing
AZ.4.W.4 Produce clear and coherent functional writing (e.g., friendly and formal letters, recipes, experiments, notes/messages, labels, graphs/tables, procedures, invitations, envelopes) in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.
AZ5.W.4 Produce clear and coherent functional writing (e.g., formal letters, recipes, experiments, notes/messages, labels, timelines, graphs/tables, procedures, invitations, envelopes) in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge
4.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
a. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions].”).
b. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text”).
5.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
a. Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast two or
Overview

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and Lewis and Clark's Expedition to explore this unknown land in 1804 through 1806, large numbers of people moved west to take advantage of new opportunities and rich, cheap farmland. These emigrants experienced tremendous difficulties along the route to Oregon.
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Purpose

After reading the letters and diaries written by a fictional family who was moving west along the Oregon Trail, the students will map the journey and understand the causes and effects of some of the difficulties experienced by this family.

Materials

- A set of National Geographic Society's Reading Expeditions' books Voices from America's Past: Our Journey West. A "set" is composed of six books.
- Oregon Trail Map
- Cause and Effect Sheet
- Vocabulary Sheet
- Blue and red colored pencils
- Friendly letter format.

Objectives

The student will be able to:

- read the excerpts from letters and diaries written by a fictitious pioneer family moving west along the Oregon Trail.
- Mark sections of the route on a map of the U.S.
- Make a cause and effect chart of the difficulties the family and the other travelers experienced on the trail.
- Write a friendly letter to a friend back in Sidney, New York, telling about the difficulties and some ideas of how these difficulties could be handled.

Procedures

Prerequisite Skills: Cause and Effect skills and how to write a friendly letter.

1. Place the students into six groups. Give each group a copy of Voices From America's Past: Our Journey West.
2. Distribute the supplemental vocabulary information page.
3. Discuss and review the vocabulary words and meanings on page 40 of the book, and the additional vocabulary words and meanings on the Vocabulary Information Page that accompanies this lesson.
4. Distribute a copy of the map with the route of the journey marked and labeled with states and territories.
5. Read the Introduction on page 4 and discusses the map on page 5. The groups should trace the route of the journey from Sidney, New York to Oregon City in blue.
6. Discuss some difficulties the emigrants might have had and the causes and the effects of the difficulties.
7. Assign a chapter from Voices from America's Past: Our Journey West to each group. Only assign Chapters 1 through 6. Do not assign Chapter 7.
8. Groups make a cause and effect chart listing at least four difficulties experienced by the travelers, what caused the difficulties, and the effects of the difficulties.
9. Using the map of the United States where students drew the complete route of the emigrants in blue, they should now draw the section of the route that their chapter described in red (next to the blue).
10. Give each member of the group these instructions: "You are a 10 year old child of an emigrant family traveling west from Sidney, New York to Oregon City. Write a letter to a friend back in Sidney describing three of the difficulties that you and your family experienced on the trip and what caused these difficulties. Explain to your friend what you would do differently on your next trip west in order to make your trip more successful." Instruct the students to use at least five vocabulary words from the book in their letter.

Assessment

For a group grade: Check each group's chart of difficulties, causes and effects for accuracy to assess reading standards. Each group should have at least four difficulties and their causes and effects on their chart.
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Each group’s map should be checked for accuracy of the routes to assess geography standards.

*For individual grades:* Use the 6 Traits Writing Rubric to grade the letter to travelers. Concentrate on the traits of Sentence Fluency and Conventions. Mastery will be considered 4 or higher. Check to see if at least five vocabulary words are used from the combined vocabulary lists and that those words are used correctly. The correct friendly letter format must also be used.

### Extensions

Students could research alternate routes and compare difficulties on both routes.

Students could compare roads and railroad routes used today and see if any of these follow the same route as the Oregon Trail.

Students could research the towns and cities that grew up along this route.

Students could find approximately how many miles were traveled in an average day along the Oregon Trail, and determine some landmarks in their own town that are about the same amount of miles from their present location.

### Sources

National Geographic Reading Expeditions *Voices from America’s Past: Our Journey West.*