Oregon or Bust:
The Journey West Along the Oregon Trail

Students learn of the influence of places and environments on the events and conditions settlers experienced on their journey along the Oregon Trail. These influences can be compared mathematically using percentages.

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Grade Level: 5
Duration: 1 class period

Overview
Between 1840 and 1860, 300,000 to 600,000 emigrants embarked upon the 2200-mile journey along the Oregon Trail from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City, Oregon. The varied terrain and weather conditions along the trail influenced the events and conditions of travel the emigrants experienced.

Purpose
In this lesson students will learn about the terrain, weather, and traveling conditions along the Oregon Trail. Students will practice multiplying with a decimal and finding the volume of a space.
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Materials
- Reading titled “Oregon or Bust”
- The Oregon Trail map
- Paper, pencil
- Assessment Worksheet and answer key

Objectives
The student will be able to:

1. Identify cause/effect relationships of the environments encountered along the Oregon Trail.
2. Multiply with a decimal and find the volume of a space.

Procedures

_Prerequisite Reading Skill: Understanding of cause-effect relationships._

1. Have students use the map "Oregon Trail" to find the route emigrants traveled. Point out the current states and landforms the trail included.
2. Brainstorm to assess students’ current knowledge level regarding the Oregon Trail. Be sure to discuss dates and numbers of people traveling. Discuss what the travelers had to prepare for on their journey: the terrain along the Oregon Trail and how it influenced the events and conditions of travel and the weather conditions along the Oregon Trail and how they influenced the events and conditions of travel.
3. Have students read the selection entitled “Oregon or Bust”. As they are reading, have them refer to their map of the Oregon Trail locating the different reference points along the trail.
4. After students have completed the reading, lead a class discussion of the information.

Mention that as the settlers prepared for their journey, their knowledge of the terrain of the places and weather conditions of the environments they would encounter influenced their preparations. How so? Elicit from students specific cause/effect relationships.

_Terrain:_ Wagons were 3 feet high to cross streams, tar buckets were brought to waterproof the wagons, extra wheels and axles were brought to replace ones that would break, rope was brought to lower wagons on steep hills.

_Weather conditions:_ Wagon canopies were oiled to keep out the rain; sturdy shoes were brought for varying weather conditions.

5. Discuss how the settlers’ knowledge of the trail affected their decisions as they made the journey. As they made their journey, the terrain of the places and weather conditions of the environments they encountered influenced the events and conditions of their journey. How so? Elicit from students specific cause-effect relationships.

_Terrain:_ The tall grassy plains caused men to stand on the backs of horses to see. The Platte River provided no wood for fires, so settlers used buffalo dung. The steep canyon ledges caused settlers to take apart wagons and haul them up the canyon. The slippery trails made settlers tie logs on the back of the wagons to act as brakes.

_Weather conditions:_ If settlers left early in the year, there would not be enough grass for animal grazing. If they left later in the year, they could get trapped in snow banks. They encountered windy thunderstorms, which caused them to chain the wagons together to keep them from blowing away.

6. Model the sample mathematics problem with the students. Answer any questions as needed.
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7. Students should complete assessment worksheet to test for comprehension of geography knowledge as well as math skills.

Assessment
Assessment Worksheet items 1-5 assess geography knowledge, while items 6-10 assess percentage knowledge of mathematics. Geography mastery is considered 4/5 or 80%. Mathematical percentage mastery is considered 4/5 or 80%.

Extensions
Students can plan a move across country or overseas. They need to research the terrain and weather conditions they will encounter on their move. Using what they have learned about the cause/effect relationship of the terrain and weather conditions during travel, they can make their plans accordingly.

A GeoLiteracy lesson created by Jane Chambers and produced by the Arizona Geographic Alliance focuses on the Oregon Trail: Westward Ho: The Difficulties of Emigrants Moving West.
http://geoalliance.asu.edu/azga/

Sources