

# Westward Expansion - The Oregon Trail

by ReadWorks



Go west, young man! Have you ever wondered how everyone spread out across this country from the original 13 colonies? During the period of Westward Expansion, many settlers traveled across the same 2,000-mile trail to the west. The Oregon Trail stretched from Missouri to Oregon. The journey took four to six months. Covered wagons were loaded with food and supplies. There was little room for more than one or two people to ride; so most of the pioneers had to walk the whole way - sometimes without shoes! Can you imagine walking all the way across the United States? And barefoot?

The trip was very challenging. Crossing rivers was extremely dangerous. Often parts of the wagon would break. Some people died from sickness or fatigue or even bad weather. A disease called cholera was an especially big problem. They did not know how to treat the disease successfully at the time. Once someone showed the slightest symptom of illness, he or she could die within a few hours. After a while, the grass alongside the trail started to disappear. Too many horses and cows had been grazing in the same spot from all of the traffic. The later pioneers had trouble finding food for their livestock.

The covered wagons traveled in long trains, or caravans, for safety. At night the settlers would gather their caravan into a big circle. In the middle of the circle they would build a campfire, eat, and sleep.

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

1. Which of the following is true about the Oregon Trail?
  - A. It was exactly 1,200 miles long.
  - B. It would take you north.
  - C. It stretched from Missouri to Oregon.
  - D. The journey took about two months.
  
2. An example of a caravan is
  - A. eight covered wagons traveling together on the trail.
  - B. one covered wagon traveling by itself.
  - C. a covered wagon passing a horse.
  - D. a covered wagon traveling at top speed.
  
3. Why did some settlers end up walking the trail?
  - A. There was only room for one or two people to ride in the wagon.
  - B. They liked to walk.
  - C. Pioneers were required to walk.
  - D. None of them walked because it was too far.
  
4. In order to walk 2,000 miles, a person would have to be
  - A. unfriendly.
  - B. friendly.
  - C. determined.
  - D. generous.
  
5. Why might settlers gather their covered wagons into a big circle at night?
  - A. to move more easily from one wagon to the next
  - B. to fit more people into each wagon for sleeping
  - C. to ensure a safe place to eat, and sleep
  - D. to block the wind so they could start a fire
  
6. What were two challenges of traveling on the Oregon Trail?

7. Why would a family use a covered wagon to travel westward on the Oregon Trail?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Too many horses and cows had been grazing in the same spot on the trail from all of the traffic; \_\_\_\_\_ the later pioneers had no food for their livestock.

- A. in addition
- B. as a result
- C. because
- D. once

9. **Vocabulary Word:** fatigue: extreme tiredness.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: