

Idaho State Historical Society  
**OREGON TRAIL LESSON PLANS**

Introduction

Teachers who participated in Oregon Trail workshops sponsored by the Idaho State Historical Society created the following lesson plans. The workshops, "Indian-White Relations Along the Oregon Trail in Southeastern and Southwestern Idaho" provided on-site experiences for participants at many of the Trail "landmarks" included in the Oregon Trail Virtual Tour.

The lessons have been edited for length and content. You will find a comprehensive annotated bibliography at the end of the lessons that will help you identify materials for future reference.

Click on any link below for the lesson plan:

**Learning With Journals**

by Vaughn Peck, Mountain View Middle School, Blackfoot, ID

**Journal Writing**

by Lark Kruse, Popplewell Elementary, Buhl, ID

**Oregon Trail Field Trip Plan**

by Laura Johnson, Pocatello

# Learning With Journals

by Vaughn Peck, Mountain View Middle School, Blackfoot, ID

SUBJECT AREA: English and Reading

GRADE LEVEL: Middle School, Junior High, High School

INTRODUCTION: Background discussion. From the study of the journals we can learn of the past, live better in the present, and plan for the future.

TOPIC: Journals

The following questions could be asked

- A. What is a journal?
- B. Who writes in journals?
- C. What do you keep or write in a journal?
- D. Have you ever read a journal written by someone who lived a long time ago?
  1. Share what you read.
  2. Was this journal written by a relative or by someone else?
  3. How did you come by this journal?
- E. Give reasons that express the importance of keeping a journal.  
Examples: dates (birth - death), marriage, special events, descriptions, thoughts, food, feelings, etc.

## OPTIONS

### ASSIGNMENT #1

Students will begin to keep a daily journal using the ideas that were discussed the day before. This journal will be written in daily, but it is personal and private and will not be read unless the student wants to share the information.

Some days students will be given topics to write on, and these topic responses may be shared in the class. This activity will continue all school year. At the end of the assignment length students will be given time to review their journals and write a short report on what they gained from the activity of keeping a journal, and what they learned about themselves.

### ASSIGNMENT # 2

Students are to ask their parents for information about their ancestry. Students need to ask about letters, journals, histories, etc. that may be a part of their family's heritage to find out about their ancestry. Students need to come prepared to share with the class any information found.

### ASSIGNMENT # 3 - Create a Booklet

Use your imagination and make-up a short story that may have taken place as you and your family journeyed along the Oregon Trail on your way to a new home in the West.

Describe

1. How you traveled?
2. What provisions did you bring?
3. What did you see along the way?
4. Did anything happen along the way?
5. Did anyone get sick?
6. What stories were told?
7. What did you do for entertainment?
8. What foods did you eat?

- a. How did you get it?
  - b. Who prepared it & how?
  - c. What was for dessert?
9. How were you dressed?
  10. Were you scared?
  11. When did you arrive?  
\*Were you met by relatives or by someone else?
  12. What was your first home like?
  13. How did you travel to school?
  14. Was there a doctor?

# Journal Writing

by Lark Kruse, Popplewell Elementary, Buhl, ID

SUBJECT AREA: Reading and Writing

GRADE LEVEL: Elementary

INTRODUCTION: This activity would take at least two weeks or more because of the skills involved. Each paragraph will probably take one period a day.

ACTIVITY: My activity will be to have children understand the importance of journal writing and to practice writing their own journal, also using the skills of proper penmanship, grammar, spelling, and paragraphing. This will, I hope, become a lifelong hobby.

To introduce this activity I will tell the students about the Oregon Trail. I will explain about how the journals were and are an important source of information to historians. I will read some excerpts from journals by actual people who traveled the Oregon Trail (from various sources). These will be appropriate to grade level. We will discuss what has been read as a class.

We will then copy an entry off the board working on all writing skills as well as understanding the context. Sample text for this activity will be based on the knowledge of an area the children are familiar with. Perhaps the playground could be described as well as the activities that can be seen on the playground. Students and teacher will then make up a "class" entry to be put on the board where the class pretends to be on the Oregon Trail. The class will copy this entry down.

Our next step will be to copy an actual (perhaps edited) entry from the board discussing all aspects as mentioned earlier. During this time, map reading could also be introduced to show the children where in America the entry took place.

After the children become somewhat comfortable with copying an entry from the board, the next step would be to have them all record an entry given orally by the teacher based on an actual entry. Students will record what has been told. These would be corrected for the areas of penmanship, grammar, spelling, and paragraphing.

After this week of introduction, students will make their own journals. The first journals will be made into the shape of a book. The covers will be made like wagon wheels or a covered wagon. Children may also design their own cover. Paper will be stapled into the booklet and cut into the chosen shape. There will be enough paper in the journal for one week.

During this week, each student will write in their journal using the information gained during the previous week; proper writing skills, grammar, and paragraph format. These student journals, based mostly on the playground or other areas that the children are familiar with, will be turned in to be graded according to the school's standards.

After the second week of journal writing is over, students will be required to bring a spiral notebook (or make a journal at school) to use as a journal for the rest of the nine week period. Students will be encouraged to record daily events, weather, and other interesting aspects of daily school life. These would not be graded but would periodically be checked for skills development.

It is my hope that students will achieve a greater understanding of the importance of journal writing for the purpose of both writing for history and for their own enjoyment.

# Oregon Trail Field Trip Plan

by Laura Johnson, Pocatello

SUBJECT AREA: Social Studies, Idaho History

GRADE LEVEL: Middle School/Secondary

## OBJECTIVES:

1. TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MOTIVATED EMIGRANTS TO ENDURE THE TRAIL.
2. TO UNDERSTAND THE METHOD OF TRAVEL USED IN EMIGRATION.
3. TO UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONS OF INDIANS AND EMIGRANTS ON THE TRAIL.
4. TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS REQUIRED TO SURVIVE THE EMIGRATION

Think carefully about the following questions and discuss them with your group one at a time before taking a field trip to an Oregon Trail site. (If a teacher is unable to visit an actual Oregon Trail site, this activity can still be used by taking advantage of the photographs posted on the Oregon Trail Virtual Tour.) Then, have them answer the same questions by writing them down while they are on the field trip or looking at one photograph on the virtual tour. The year is 1850 and the students must put themselves into this time period. Make sure the answers are numbered just like the questions.

1. Look out toward the sagebrush for a few minutes. Draw a picture of what you see for ten minutes. Knowing that you must travel over this large area of land tomorrow, write two sentences or more about how this scenery makes you feel.
2. What water sources are present at this site (if any)? Where will you get your water when you leave today?
3. List every animal you observe today. Look carefully at the ground and in the distance. Which of these animals could you eat if your provisions were stolen, lost in a river crossing, or simply ran out?
4. Using a plant identification book and a list of edible plants, list all the plants you found here that could be eaten.
5. List all of the plants that you could use for medicine if sick.
6. Where would you take cover if it began to hail very hard? List three places present at the site.
7. Where would you sleep if the covered wagon was already full?
8. Where will you go tomorrow? Which direction and how far do you hope to travel in one day? How will you know the way? What will you do when the trail splits, going two ways?
9. Describe today's weather. Explain how the weather makes you feel today if you were walking behind a wagon on the trail.
10. What would you do if a band of Native Americans approached your camp? What might they want? (List five things)
11. List any items you might find along the trail that might have been used by the Native Americans. These may include obsidian, plants, water, grass feed for horses, etc.
12. Go to the deepest ruts found on the Oregon Trail. Measure;
  - A. Depth of one rut. How many wagons do you estimate traveled over this path?
  - B. Width of trail, from one side to the other side.
13. Look carefully at the rocks found on or around the trail. Describe the most common rocks. Are they smooth or jagged? Size? How would your feet feel after walking 10- 20 miles on these rocks? What kind of shoes would you like to wear?
14. What kind of clothing would be best for this long, long walk?