Westward Expansion - The Oregon Trail

by ReadWorks



Go west, young man! Have you ever wondered how colonial settlers spread out across this country from the **original** 13 colonies? Native Americans had been living on land west of the colonies for thousands of years. However, during the period called Westward **Expansion**, many settlers traveled across these lands and settled there. Many of them traveled on the Oregon Trail, a 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.

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Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. What was the Oregon Trail?

A. a type of covered wagon

B. a 2,000 mile trail to the west

C. a disease that hurt settlers

D. a trail to get farther north

2. How does the text describe the journey for pioneers on the Oregon Trail?

A. easy

B. calm

C. dangerous

D. forgettable

3. Read the following sentences from the text.

"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."

What conclusion can you draw from this evidence?

A. Grass alongside the trail was not important to the pioneers.

B. The pioneers had plenty of food options on the Oregon Trail, even without grass.

C. Only few pioneers used the Oregon Trail as a path to get out west.

D. The later pioneers had a harder time providing for their animals than the earlier pioneers.

4. In order to walk 2,000 miles, a person would have to be

A. unfriendly.

B. friendly.

C. determined.

D. generous.

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5. What is the main idea of the text?

A. Many settlers went on a dangerous and challenging journey on the Oregon Trail in order to travel west.

B. Covered wagons loaded with food and supplies were an easy way to transport people from one place to another.

C. Cholera was a disease that killed many pioneers very quickly since no one knew how to treat it at the time.

D. On the Oregon Trail, settlers would gather their caravans at night in a big circle and build a campfire to stay safe.

6. Read the following sentences from the text.

"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."

As used in this excerpt, what does the word "**challenging**" most closely mean?

A. inspiring

B. simple

C. difficult

D. fancy

7. 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

8. What were two challenges of traveling on the Oregon Trail?

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

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