

“Shifting Powers on the Plains”

Westward Expansion

Lesson prepared for:

Dr. Kevin Bower

By

Jan McNally

July 27, 2010

After seeing first hand the ruts made by the pioneers' wagons so long ago, I found that I wanted to share the experience with my students. The ruts were nothing like I imagined they would look and it made me see the landscape of Nebraska in a new way. This topic will also tie in nicely with our "One Land, Many Trails" theme in our reading series.

In conjunction with fifth grade reading, Theme 5, “Pioneer Girl”, students will learn about the pioneer experience on the Oregon Trail and use the creative writing process to share what they have learned. Students will also learn what life was like for early settlers and compare and contrast life and travel today with that of the 1800’s.

Before the lesson, explore what students already know about pioneers. Who were they? When did they travel? Where did they come from? Where did they go, and why?

On a map of the United States, show students a state far away from Nebraska. Tell students to imagine that they are going to move to this distant state one month from now. Have students brainstorm a list of questions about the trip (e.g., How will I get there? With whom will I travel? How long will it take to get there? What can I take with me? Why am I going?) Record all ideas on the board or large post-it, and save for future reference.

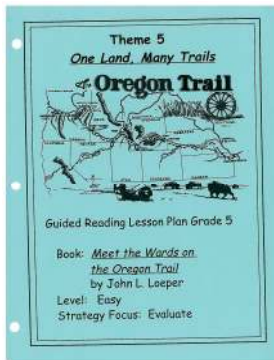
Have each student create a story about his or her imagined trip. If students get stuck for ideas, have them use the listed questions generated earlier. After their stories are complete, ask for volunteers to orally share what they have written.

Explain to students that they are now going to learn about the experiences of people who really did move across the country along the Oregon Trail by reading, “Pioneer Girl” in their reading anthology. Students will compare and contrast the story they wrote with that of “Pioneer Girl”.

Using class discussion, students will come to a better understanding of the hardships faced by the early pioneers.

As an additional project, students can work in pairs and make a diorama of events that could have happened during a trip on the Oregon Trail.

Students can also research and report on the other trails used by pioneers, i.e. California, Chisholm, Mormon, Pony Express, etc.



Houghton Mifflin Reading, Theme 5, One Land, Many Trails, 2003

Social Studies Objective 4.2