

This article originally appeared in the September 2014 issue of *Book Links* magazine.



More than 100 years after the first settlers forged a path west, the Oregon Trail continues to fascinate us. Perhaps it's because it is astounding to know that, according to Marc Aronson in his introduction to Tod Olson's *How to Get Rich on the Oregon Trail: My Adventures among Cows, Crooks, and Heroes on the Road to Fame and Fortune*, roughly a quarter of a million people set off from the Missouri River to the West between the 1840s and '50s. In 1852, 60,000 people alone traveled the Oregon Trail! Or perhaps it's because it's difficult to imagine walking 15 to 20 miles a day for five months while also risking buffalo stampedes, treacherous river crossings, extreme heat and cold, infectious illnesses, and other life-threatening dangers. Or perhaps it's simply because stories of the Oregon Trail remind us of the American spirit that helped shape the nation. Whether students are reading for assignments or for personal interest, the books and activities in this annotated bibliography pique readers' curiosity about westward expansion.

Why Settlers Went West

Westward Expansion. By Greg Roza. 2011. 32p. illus. Gareth Stevens, paper, \$10.50 (9781433947810); lib. ed., \$26.60 (9781433947803); e-book, \$26.60 (9781433947834). 978. Gr. 4–6.

This entry in the *Story of America* series focuses on the concept of manifest destiny. It chronologically shows the various ways that the nation grew, including the Louisiana Purchase, the building of the Erie Canal, and the acquisition of the Oregon Territory. The book also features archival photos, reproductions, maps, a time line, a glossary, and lists of resources.

Westward, Ho! How America Expanded. By Darren Sechrist. 2008. 32p. illus. Crabtree, paper, \$9.95 (9780778742173); lib. ed., \$29.27 (9780778741909). 978. Gr. 3–5.

Vignettes in a colorful graphic-novel format give an overview of westward expansion. Among the vignettes is information on the Oregon Trail, including why Oregon was an early draw, and on the missionary work of Marcus Whitman, a doctor who helped guide more than 1,000 settlers along the trail. A time line and “webfinder” further complement this entry in the *Graphic America* series.

Who Were the American Pioneers? And Other Questions about Westward Expansion. By Martin W. Sandler. Illus. by Robert Barrett. 2014. 32p. Sterling, \$12.95 (9781402796241); paper, \$5.95 (9781402790478). 978. Gr. 3–5.

Guided questions—“Was life hard for the pioneers?” “What did the pioneers use to build their first homes?”—relate the reasons behind westward expansion as well as how pioneers traveled, what they brought with them, who they encountered along the way, and their living conditions once they reached their destination. Reproductions also provide visual clues in this *Good Question!* series title.

How Settlers Traveled

Great Pioneer Projects You Can Build Yourself. By Rachel Dickinson. Illus. by Shawn Braley. 2007. 128p. Nomad, paper, \$15.95 (9780978503765); e-book, \$12.95 (9781936749263). 745.5. Gr. 5–8.

In addition to hands-on activities, this title covers the reasons that settlers headed west, wagon trains, popular travel routes, and travelers' hardships along the way as well as pioneer homes, food, school, entertainment, and other aspects of pioneer life. Each chapter includes an introductory text with numerous sidebars, facts, visuals, primary source quotes, and easy-to-follow projects that extend interest in the topic.

Heading West: Life with the Pioneers, 21 Activities. By Pat McCarthy. 2009. 144p. illus. Chicago Review, paper, \$16.95 (9781556528095); e-book, \$13.99 (9781613741993). 978.02. Gr. 4–7.

Following an introduction to the people and events that initiated westward expansion, this looks at the journeys along the Oregon Trail and other routes as well as pioneer homes and communities. Other chapters focus on pioneer men, women, and children. Twenty-one related activities, along with numerous visuals, interesting sidebars, and primary source quotes, make the topic engaging.

How Many People Traveled the Oregon Trail? And Other Questions about the Trail West. By Miriam Aronin. 2012. 48p. illus. Lerner, paper, \$9.95 (9780761385660); lib. ed., \$30.60 (9780761353324); e-book, \$21.95 (9780761388302). 978. Gr. 3–6.

Guided questions and answers describe who blazed the Oregon Trail, why and where the trail began, life along the trail, where the emigrants settled, why people stopped traveling the trail, and how today's historians know about these experiences. Complemented by reproductions and maps, this *Six Questions of American History* book offers more details than other titles on the topic.

Wagon Trains and Settlers. By Ellen H. Todras. 2011. 32p. illus. Kingfisher, paper, \$9.99 (9780753465110); lib. ed., \$19.89 (9780753465837). 973.8. Gr. 4–6.

Double-page spreads, accompanied by detailed illustrations and reproductions, explore why settlers headed west and the trails, including the Oregon Trail, that they took. The bulk of this All about America title looks at the often dangerous conditions the settlers encountered and the supplies they needed and traded. It concludes with the establishment of settlements in the West.

Settlers' Stories

Apples to Oregon: Being the (Slightly) True Narrative of How a Brave Pioneer Father Brought Apples, Peaches, Pears, Plums, Grapes, and Cherries (and Children) across the Plains. By Deborah Hopkinson. Illus. by Nancy Carpenter. 2004. 40p. Atheneum, \$17.99 (9780689847691); paper, \$6.99 (9781416967460); e-book, \$6.99 (9781442484498). K–Gr. 3.

Spirited oil paintings illustrate this tall-tale account of how the first apple trees came to Oregon. After a young girl's father sets his sights on moving to Oregon, he can't bear to leave his apple trees behind. In addition to their large family, their wagon hauls hundreds of fruit trees. The young girl humorously tells how the whole family pitches in to save the plants from the many perils along the Oregon Trail.

The Buffalo Storm. By Katherine Applegate. Illus. by Jan Ormerod. 2007. 32p. Clarion, paper, \$6 (9780544339217). PreS–Gr. 2.

Hallie's family is preparing to head west, and with the help of her grandmother's quilt, the young girl faces many frightening hardships along the Oregon Trail. The lyrical text and atmospheric illustrations, rendered in watercolor and pastel, depict the dusty plains and beautiful rock formations as well as such common dangers as thunderstorms, icy rivers, and buffalo stampedes.

A Heart for Any Fate: Westward to Oregon, 1845. By Linda Crew. 2009. 256p. illus. Ooligan, paper, \$11.95 (9781932010268). Gr. 6–10.

Seventeen-year-old Lovisa narrates this riveting novel, based on bare facts of the author's extended family. As the King family loads five covered wagons and sets out from Missouri to Oregon, Lovisa looks forward to adventure. Their journey turns grueling, however, as illness and death claim some members. A comprehensive foreword and afterword (with photos) complete the tale.

How to Get Rich on the Oregon Trail: My Adventures among Cows, Crooks, and Heroes on the Road to Fame and Fortune. By Tod Olson. Illus. by Scott Allred and Gregory Proch. 2009. 48p. National Geographic, \$18.95 (9781426304125); lib. ed., \$27.90 (9781426304132). Gr. 4–8.

In this fictitious journal, 15-year-old William Reed recounts his family's journey along the Oregon Trail. Accompanying sketches, reproductions, survival tips, and a ledger that tallies his expenses (e.g., ferry crossings) and income (e.g., fixing wagons) lend the look and feel of a scrapbook. A concluding "Encyclopedia" fills in details about important people, places, and experiences.

The Oregon Trail: An Interactive History Adventure. By Matt Doeden. 2014. 112p. illus. Capstone, paper, \$6.95 (9781476536071); lib. ed., \$31.32 (9781476502540). 978. Gr. 3–6.

Using a choose-your-own-adventure format, this entry in the You Choose: History series follows three fictional young people. Riding along the Oregon Trail, guiding a wagon train, and heading for gold, they face abandonment, food shortages, disease, hostile interactions with Native Americans, and other perils. A final chapter discusses the legacy of the Oregon Trail.

Oregon Trail: The Road to Destiny. By Frank Young. Illus. by David Lasky. 2011. 224p. Sasquatch, paper, \$14.95 (9781570616495); e-book, \$14.95 (9781570617829). 741.5. Gr. 3–6.

After her father sells their Baltimore home for a new life in Oregon, 11-year-old Rebecca records her family's harrowing journey along the Oregon Trail in a fictionalized diary. This expertly rendered graphic novel provides both textual and visual information about the wonders (e.g., viewing beautiful landforms and meeting Native Americans) and many more hardships (e.g., accidents, disease, and death).

Papa and the Pioneer Quilt. By Jean Van Leeuwen. Illus. by Rebecca Bond. 2007. 32p. Dial, o.p. K–Gr. 2.

When Papa's feet set to wandering again, Rebecca and her family join a wagon train to Oregon. The girl soon gets the idea to sew a quilt and begins collecting scraps of fabric in unusual ways, from her father's shirt, torn from a river crossing, to a tablecloth during an abandoned wagon. Highlighted by folksy acrylic paintings, the book concludes with an author's note about pioneer quilts.

The Tragic Tale of Narcissa Whitman and a Faithful History of the Oregon Trail. By Cheryl Harness. Illus. by the author. 2006. 144p. National Geographic, \$16.95 (9780792259206); lib. ed., \$25.90 (9780792259213). 917.804. Gr. 4–7.

Narcissa dreamed of bringing Christianity to far-off places. After marrying Marcus Whitman in 1836, she realized her dream and became one of the first women to travel the Oregon Trail. The narrative, told in a conversational style and augmented with excerpts from Narcissa's journal, recounts her journey and tragic end as a missionary. A running time line places her life in the context of world events.

Voices from the Oregon Trail. By Kay Winters. Illus. by Larry Day. 2014. 48p. Dial, \$17.99 (9780803737754); e-book, \$10.99 (9780698150522). 978. Gr. 4–6.

Seventeen free-verse poems represent the points of view of fictional people traveling in a wagon train from Independence, Missouri, to Oregon City in 1848. The voices include young people, mothers whose children have died, and a Sioux scout. Historical details, extensive back matter, and colorful illustrations rendered in pencil, ink, watercolor, and gouache help convey the time period.

Wagons Ho! By George Hallowell and Joan Holub. Illus. by Lynne Avril. 2011. 32p. Albert Whitman, \$16.99 (9780807586129). Gr. 1–3.

Both Jenny's and Katie's families are moving from Missouri to Oregon; the difference is that Jenny's family will follow the Oregon Trail in 1846 for five months, and Katie's modern family will take the interstate for five days. Lively side-by-side comparisons show how each family handles preparation, meals, accommodations, rough terrain, hardships, resettlement, and other events along the way.

Westward to Home: Joshua's Oregon Trail Diary. By Patricia Hermes. 2001. 112p. Scholastic, o.p. Gr. 3–5.

Through the 1848 journal of nine-year-old Joshua McCullough, readers come face-to-face with the rigors of the wagon-train trek from St. Joseph, Missouri, to the Oregon Territory. Washing away trail dust that cakes the animals' eyes shut and burying those who die along the way from illness or wagon accidents are among the events recounted in this *My America* title. The story continues in *A Perfect Place: Joshua's Oregon Trail Diary* (2002).

Women of the Frontier: 16 Tales of Trailblazing Homesteaders, Entrepreneurs, and Rabble-Rousers. By Brandon Marie Miller. 2013. 256p. illus. Chicago Review, \$19.95 (9781883052973); e-book, \$15.99 (9781613740002). 978. Gr. 6–10.

From Oregon Trail and Donner Party survivors to women

captured by and assimilated into Native American tribes, these 16 mini biographies include both well- and lesser-known pioneer women. Complemented by snippets of primary sources, this presents an engaging look at trail travel, work, entertainment, social issues, and grueling hardships along the frontier from a feminine perspective.

Native American Perspectives

Minnow and Rose: An Oregon Trail Story. By Judy Young. Illus. by Bill Farnsworth. 2009. 32p. Sleeping Bear, \$17.95 (9781585364213); e-book, \$17.95 (9781133702016). Gr. 3–5.

When Rose's family and the rest of their Oregon Trail wagon train stop along a river, Rose meets Minnow, a local Native American girl. Their curiosity about each other turns to friendship after Rose falls out of her wagon while crossing a river and Minnow rescues her in this *Tales of Young Americans* book. Illustrated with realistic paintings, the book includes an author's note about similar events.

Oglala Lakota Chief Red Cloud. By William R. Sanford. 2013. 48p. illus. Enslow, paper, \$7.95 (9781464402593); lib. ed., \$21.26 (9780766040960). 978.004. Gr. 5–8.

Part of the *Native American Chiefs and Warriors* series, this well-balanced biography recounts Red Cloud's youth and warrior training and emphasizes the U.S. government's infringement upon Native American land. It includes the chief's fight to prevent whites from traveling along the Oregon and Bozeman Trails, his meeting with President Ulysses S. Grant, and his band's forced move to a reservation.

Angela Leeper is the Director of the Curriculum Materials Center at the University of Richmond (Virginia).

Common Core Connections

Below are suggestions for implementing the Common Core State Standards across subject areas with titles about westward expansion and the Oregon Trail. You can find more information about the standards on the Common Core website: corestandards.org

In the Classroom: After students have read Jean Van Leeuwen's *Papa and the Pioneer Quilt*, have them identify key events in which Rebecca collected fabric scraps and explain how these events impacted her journey. Next, students can collect their own paper and fabric scraps and glue them together to make a "quilt" panel collage. In discussion or as a written exercise, students can also relate any personal experiences to their fabric choices.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.3.** With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.3.** Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.3.** Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

In the Classroom: After a class read-aloud of *Wagons Ho!*, by George Hallowell and Joan Holub, students can compare and contrast Jenny's and Katie's journeys on the Oregon Trail with the use of Venn diagrams, either individually or in small or large groups, and then discuss the results. They can also compare and contrast their own methods of travel with those of pioneers using Venn diagrams.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.Math.Content.1.MD.C.4.** Organize, represent, and interpret data with up to three categories; ask and answer questions about the total number of data points, how many in each category, and how many more or less are in one category than in another.

In the Classroom: Students can select one of the women depicted in *Women of the Frontier: 16 Tales of Trailblazing Homesteaders, Entrepreneurs, and Rabble-Rousers*, by Brandon Marie Miller. Have them conduct additional research if needed and then write a descriptive journal entry based on a key event in the pioneer's life.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3–8.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

In the Classroom: Using William Reed as a model, from Tod Olson's *How to Get Rich on the Oregon Trail: My Adventures among Cows, Crooks, and Heroes on the Road to Fame and Fortune*, have students create characters and situations that reflect gains and losses in income during a trek along the Oregon Trail (or, alternatively, create the characters and situations and then assign them to students). The class members can then track their income and compare results together.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.Math.Content.4.OA.A.3.** Solve multistep word problems posed with whole numbers and having whole-number answers using the four operations, including problems in which remainders must be interpreted.

In the Classroom: Following a reading of or listening to *The Buffalo Storm*, by Katherine Applegate, have students identify some of the numerous descriptive adjectives from the text and explain how those words enhance the story.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.4.** Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.4.** Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

In the Classroom: According to Rachel Dickinson's *Great Pioneer Projects You Can Build Yourself*, pioneers walked about 15 miles a day for five months. After students determine how many steps they walk in a single yard, have them calculate how many steps they would walk in a mile, on a typical day, along the Oregon Trail—and then at the end of five months.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.Math.Content.6.EE.B.6.** Use variables to represent numbers and write expressions when solving a real-world or mathematical problem; understand that a variable can represent an unknown number, or, depending on the purpose at hand, any number in a specified set.
- **CCSS.Math.Content.7.EE.B.3.** Solve multistep real-life and mathematical problems posed with positive and negative rational numbers in any form (whole numbers, fractions, and decimals), using tools strategically.

In the Classroom: As a class, identify the characteristics of a tall tale that are represented in *Apples to Oregon: Being the (Slightly) True Narrative of How a Brave Pioneer Father Brought Apples, Peaches, Pears, Plums, Grapes, and Cherries (and Children) across the Plains*, by Deborah Hopkinson. Then, compare them to tall-tale traits represented in one or two of the selections in Mary Pope Osborne's *American Tall Tales* (1991) or in another, similar, collection.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.9.** Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story by different authors or from different cultures.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.2.** Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

In the Classroom: The free-verse poems in *Voices from the Oregon Trail*, by Kay Winters, are ready-made scripts for readers' theater. Students could adapt the poems to suit one or multiple voices in dynamic read-alouds.

Common Core Connections

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.6.** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate to task and situation.