



BLACK ROCK DESERT
HIGH ROCK CANYON
EMIGRANT TRAILS



NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

EMIGRANT TRAILS

Emigrant Trails: Using Historical Journals in the Classroom

Grade Level: Upper Elementary/Middle School

Introduction: This series of lesson plans focuses on five diaries written by emigrants who traveled on the California and Oregon Trails. Benjamin Ross Cauthorn traveled with his entire family from Missouri to Oregon in 1865. Lucia Lamb Everett traveled from Illinois to Nevada in 1862 with her new husband. Cyrus E. Phillips made the journey by ox team from Indiana to California in 1852. Levi Jackman left Illinois for Salt Lake City with the Mormon Church in 1847. And lastly, James S. Tolles set out for California from Illinois with his father and younger brother in 1849. These diaries reveal much about daily life on the trail during the mid-1800s. Weather, provisions, encounters with Indians, and distance traveled are just some of the topics discussed. Diaries and journals are important historical documents. Children can learn from them if they are helped to find the information. These lesson plans provide teachers with several ways to do this through reading and writing exercises.

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to introduce students to the rhythms of emigrant trails and life in the past. This lesson also increases students' awareness about the concepts of change, continuity, historical perspective, and evidence. This lesson introduces students to journal writing.

Objectives: The student will be able to complete a Retrieval Chart using information from an emigrant's diary. The student will be able to write a story from the perspective of an 19th century emigrant or a present day person joining a wagon train in the mid-1800s. The student will be able to differentiate between a diary and a journal and will write in a classroom journal daily.

Nevada State Standards:

History Standard 6.0: 1700 to 1865: Students understand the people, events, ideas, and conflicts that led to the creation of new nations and distinctive cultures.

Reading Content Standard 3.0: Students read to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate literature from a variety of authors, cultures, and times.

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Writing Content Standard 5.0: Students write a variety of texts that inform, persuade, describe, evaluate, or tell a story and are appropriate to purpose and audience.

Materials:

- ◆ Emigrants' journals
- ◆ Retrieval Charts
- ◆ Classroom Journals





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Anticipatory Set: Show historical pictures of pioneers emigrating out west or a short video if available. Discuss such topics as why people would leave their families and homes to settle out west; the time period emigrants traveled; what hardships they would encounter; what life was like in the 1800s.



Developing the Lesson: Introduce the historical journals. Give a short bio of each emigrant. Break class into five groups and assign a diary to each group. Have the groups read their journal excerpts out loud and analyze the contents of the journals together. The following are exercises that further explore each diary:

- **Introduction to Historical Journals:**

1. Hand out the Retrieval Charts and read directions together.
2. Ask for examples of present-day “transportation,” “family life,” “food,” “chores,” “language/writing style,” and “landscape descriptions.”
3. Groups work together to fill out the Retrieval Charts—one for each journal. It may be helpful to have students compare the past with a present day trip or move.
4. Make lists of the evidence on the board.
5. Have students make generalizations about transportation, chores, etc. on the trails out west. Have them think carefully about age and gender differences when making their generalizations.

- **Continuity and Change**

1. Compare the lists of past and present activities from the previous exercise.
2. Discuss what has changed and what has remained the same
3. Questions to ask:
 - How are things different from what they are today?
 - Is the change for better or worse?
 - What things have remained the same?
 - What might stay the same for the next generation of children?
 - What things will be different for the next generation of children?





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Historical Sources

1. Now that students have a list of what they know about the diarists' lives, make a list of what they don't know.
2. Brainstorm a list of sources from which they could find more information:
photographs, letters, drawings, objects, gravestones, books
3. Consider calling your local historical society (or another expert on the topic) and either arranging a visit to examine their collections relating to emigrant trails or having someone bring artifacts to school.
4. Have students choose a perspective to tell a story about traveling on the California or Oregon Trail during the mid-1800s. They could be:
 - A. a time traveler coming from the present to join a 19th-century wagon train
 - B. a time traveler coming from a 19th century wagon train to the present

Classroom Journals

These journals are different from the diaries most students might imagine. Students will probably think that diaries imply privacy and embarrassment; these journals actually record events, activities, and feelings that can be shared with others. Diaries or journals of this nature, provide:

- a safe ground for experimenting in writing.
- raw material for writing assignments.
- a way to learn to write clearly.
- a way to share written communication.

Writing Tips

The following are some tips to help implement a successful journal-writing program into your class:

1. Discuss the difference between diaries and journals. Discuss what is and is not appropriate to write in a journal.
2. Use small journal books that will be filled quickly. It is motivating for them to "turn in their old book for a new one."
3. Encourage students to write daily. Set aside time in the day for writing. Post an ideas list on the wall for students to refer to if they get stuck.
4. Allow a few minutes after any major events for students to write (i.e.: a rainstorm





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Closure: As a culminating activity for your study of emigrant diaries, have students donate their journals to a historical society or the school in a sealed “time capsule” to be opened in fifty years. Make the event ceremonial by inviting the newspaper to photograph the journals being donated and have the class write and submit an article to be published.

Evaluation: Formally evaluate students’ knowledge of historical journals by assessing the work that they hand in (Retrieval Chart, time travel story, classroom journal). Informally evaluate students by their participation in the activities and by observing their work in groups.

Lesson Plan



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Emigrants' Diaries Retrieval Chart

Lesson Plan

	Transportation	Food	Family Life	Chores	Landscape Description	Language / Writing Style
Present						
Past						