



BLACK ROCK DESERT  
HIGH ROCK CANYON  
EMIGRANT TRAILS



NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

# Lunch on the Trail Lesson Plan

## A Typical Lunch on the Trail!

**Grade Level:** Elementary

**Purpose:** To help students simulate trail life by preparing and eating a typical meal that an emigrant would have prepared and eaten for months on the journey west.

**Objective:** The student will be able to identify what the emigrants ate on the California Trail. The student will be able to prepare and taste a typical trail meal. The student will be able to write a journal entry describing the experience.

**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.

**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:**

- ◆ For bread: flour, baking soda, water, bowls, wooden spoons.
- ◆ Cans of baked beans, can opener.
- ◆ Bacon, frying pan.
- ◆ Coffee (you can prepare ahead of time or make camp coffee by boiling coffee grounds in a pot and straining).
- ◆ Stove.
- ◆ Plates, cups, and eating utensils.
- ◆ \*Note: Meal would have been eaten cold; serve beans and coffee cold if possible.

**Anticipatory Set:** Summarize what has already been learned about pioneer life on the trail. Discuss what daily life was like by making a list of daily activities on the board for men, women, and children. Put an asterisk next to all activities relating to food and discuss in more detail if necessary. To help better understand what daily life was like, tell students that they are going to have the opportunity to experience a typical lunch on the trail. Refer back to the asterisks on the list and discuss who would have performed what roles in each activity and when each activity would have taken place (answers will vary but be sure to touch on the following details: lunch would have been prepared in the morning before breaking camp, women would have cooked the meal, men would have possibly started the fire, children would have helped with the preparation and collected firewood).



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**Developing the Lesson:** Point out to students that a typical meal consisted of trail bread, bacon, beans, and coffee. Discuss why they would have eaten these particular foods. Have students work as families (small groups) to prepare the meal. Pass out supplies and give students the following directions to prepare the trail bread (see below). Assign tasks to prepare the rest of the ‘trail meal’. Enjoy eating your lunch! After everyone has eaten his or her lunch, discuss the following questions: How did the lunch taste? Imagine you are eating your meal after being on the trail all morning, how would that have affected the taste of your meal? Now imagine having that same menu for every breakfast, lunch, and dinner for months. What would that be like? What foods would you miss the most? How much do you think you will like trail bread, bacon, and beans when you finish your journey?

**Closure/Extension:** Review what a typical meal would have been like for the emigrants on the trail. Review how it would have been prepared, by whom and when. In closing, have students write an entry in their emigrant dairies about the food they ate, what role they played in preparing it, and how they, as emigrants, felt about food on the trail.

**Evaluation:** Formally assess students’ knowledge and understand of what a meal on the trail would have been like by reading their diary entries. Informally assess students by their ability to participate in the class discussion and ability to contribute meaningfully to the groups’ meal preparations.



### Trail Bread



Mix flour with a small amount of baking soda in a bowl.

Slowly add water and mix until you get a firm dough.

To simulate cooking over a fire, wrap your dough around a wooden spoon (be sure to cover the spoon so no wood is showing).

Hold your bread over the flame of a stovetop (with adult supervision) and turn until it is done. If it turns out doughy on the inside or burned on the outside, don’t worry—that’s how it turned out for most of the emigrants too!