Westward Expansion
The Oregon Trail

Go west, young man! Have you ever wondered how everyone spread out across this country from the original 13 colonies? During the period of Westward Expansion, many settlers traveled across the same 2,000-mile trail to the west. The Oregon Trail stretched from Missouri to Oregon. The journey took 4-6 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. In the days of the Oregon Trail, cholera had no cure. 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.

---

1 expansion – the act or process of getting bigger
2 settlers – a person who goes to live in a new place
3 pioneers – a person who goes to live in new or unclaimed territory
4 fatigue – extreme tiredness
5 livestock – animals raised by farmers, such as cows or pigs
1. Which of the following is true about the Oregon Trail?
   a. It was exactly 1,200 miles long.
   b. It would take you north.
   c. It stretched from Missouri to Oregon.
   d. The journey took about two months.

2. An example of a caravan is
   a. eight covered wagons traveling together on the trail.
   b. one covered wagon traveling by itself.
   c. a covered wagon passing a horse.
   d. a covered wagon traveling at top speed.

3. Why did some settlers end up walking the trail?
   a. There was only room for one or two people to ride in the wagon.
   b. They liked to walk.
   c. Pioneers were required to walk.
   d. None of them walked because it was too far.

4. In order to walk 2,000 miles, a person would have to be
   a. unfriendly.
   b. friendly.
   c. determined.
   d. generous.

5. Why might settlers gather their covered wagons into a big circle at night?
   a. to move more easily from one wagon to the next
   b. to fit more people into each wagon for sleeping
   c. to ensure a safe place to eat, and sleep
   d. to block the wind so they could start a fire
6. What were two challenges of traveling on the Oregon Trail?

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

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

________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

8. 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

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Pioneers on the Oregon Trail traveled in groups of covered wagons called caravans for safety reasons and company.

Who? pioneers

(did) What? _________________________________________________

Where? _________________________________________________________

Why? ___________________________________________________________


Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: ________________________________

________________________________________________________________
Passage Reading Level: Lexile 690

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: Pioneers traveled along the 2,000 miles of the Oregon Trail during Westward Expansion. The travel was difficult and the conditions were harsh and dangerous.

1. Which of the following is true about the Oregon Trail?
   a. It was exactly 1,200 miles long.
   b. It would take you north.
   c. **It stretched from Missouri to Oregon.**
   d. The journey took about two months.

2. An example of a caravan is
   a. **eight covered wagons traveling together on the trail.**
   b. one covered wagon traveling by itself.
   c. a covered wagon passing a horse.
   d. a covered wagon traveling at top speed.

3. Why did some settlers end up walking the trail?
   a. **There was only room for one or two people to ride in the wagon.**
   b. They liked to walk.
   c. Pioneers were required to walk.
   d. None of them walked because it was too far.

4. In order to walk 2,000 miles, a person would have to be
   a. unfriendly.
   b. friendly.
   c. **determined.**
   d. generous.

5. Why might settlers gather their covered wagons into a big circle at night?
   a. to move more easily from one wagon to the next
   b. to fit more people into each wagon for sleeping
   c. **to ensure a safe place to eat, and sleep**
   d. to block the wind so they could start a fire
6. What were two challenges of traveling on the Oregon Trail?

**Suggested answer:** Answers will vary but students could mention the dangers of river crossings, the high rate of death from illness (especially cholera), exhaustion, or weather, and the difficulty of finding food for animals.

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

**Suggested answer:** Covered wagons would allow families to carry large amounts of food and supplies on the long journey. The wagons also provided transportation for any young, old, or sick members of the family who could not walk the journey.

8. 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

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Pioneers on the Oregon Trail traveled in groups of covered wagons called caravans for safety reasons and company.

Who? pioneers

(did) What? **traveled in groups of covered wagons**

Where? **the Oregon Trail**

Why? **for safety reasons and company**


Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.