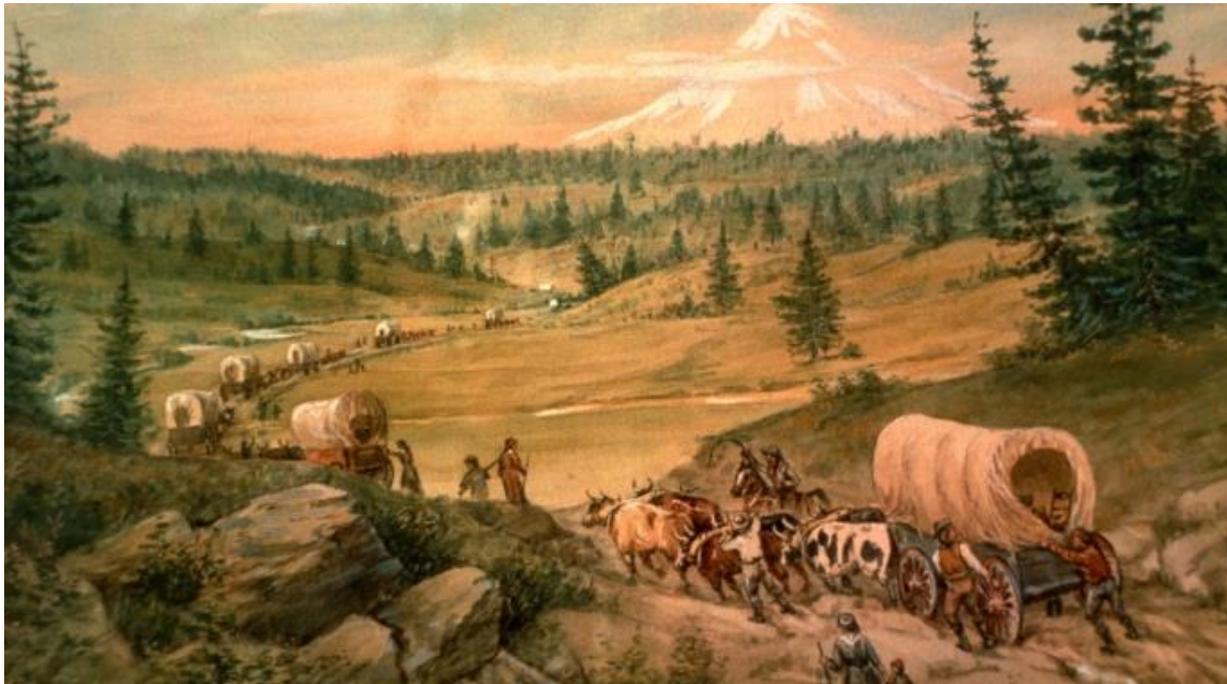


The Problems of Heading West

Lesson Objective:

To understand the issues facing those deciding to start a new life in the West by travelling along the Oregon Trail.

To know of specific examples of those who headed West – particularly the Donner Party.



Contextual information:

Before the Oregon Trail, the only way to reach the West coast of America was to reach it by sea, by sailing down around South America and up the west coast. It could take up to a year and was very expensive.

In 1825 however, a fur trapper and explorer named Jedidiah Smith found a route through the Rockies which meant the Oregon Trail could be established, now there was a route that wagons could pass along. Other fur trappers and explorers used the route too. They produced leaflets for others to follow.

In 1836, two married couples used the trail to travel to Oregon. They were missionaries who wanted to convert the native Americans to Christianity.

By 1841 60 people made the trip.

By 1842 100 people made the trip.

In 1843 900 people made the trip.

The numbers continued to grow rapidly. By 1846 more than 5,000 people had migrated west along the Oregon Trail.

**Lesson
Outcomes**

To describe the dangers and problems involved in travelling the Oregon Trail and the preparations needed to successfully reach the West coast.

Target 4-5

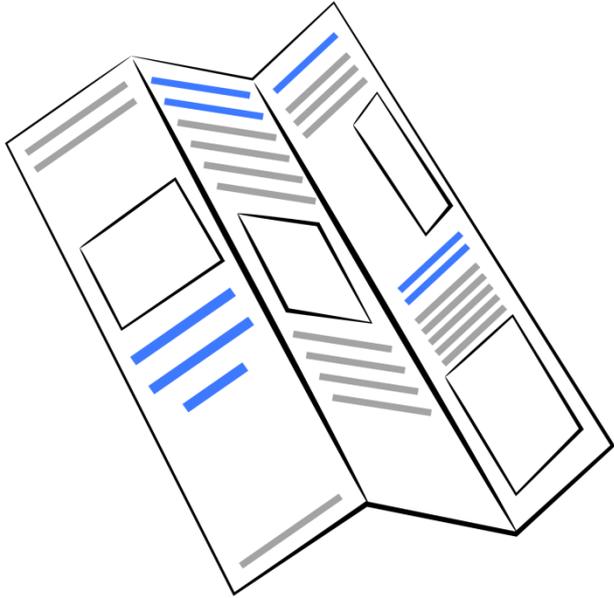
To explain the difficulties involved in heading West along the Oregon trail with particular reference to the Donner party.

Target 6

To assess the dangers and challenges involved in undertaking the Oregon Trail by looking at how far the trail was a danger to life and health, with reference to at least the Donner Party as a case study.

Target 7+

Task: Planning a trip west



Create a list of things that people who headed west had to plan for and think about before their journey

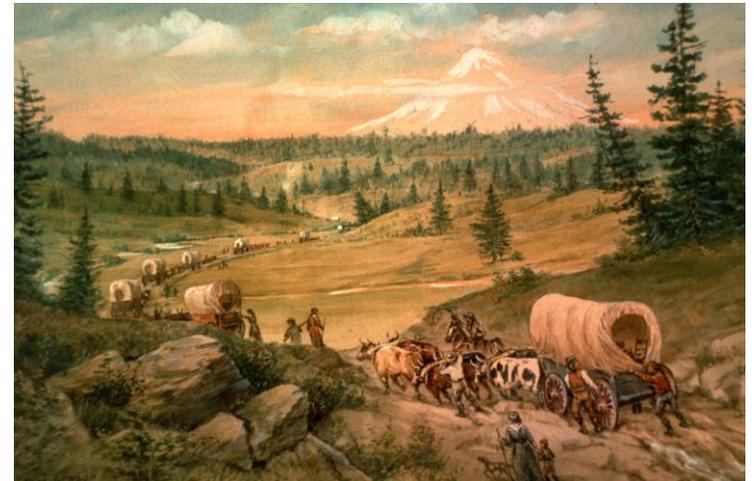
Then research and list the dangers they could face on the journey

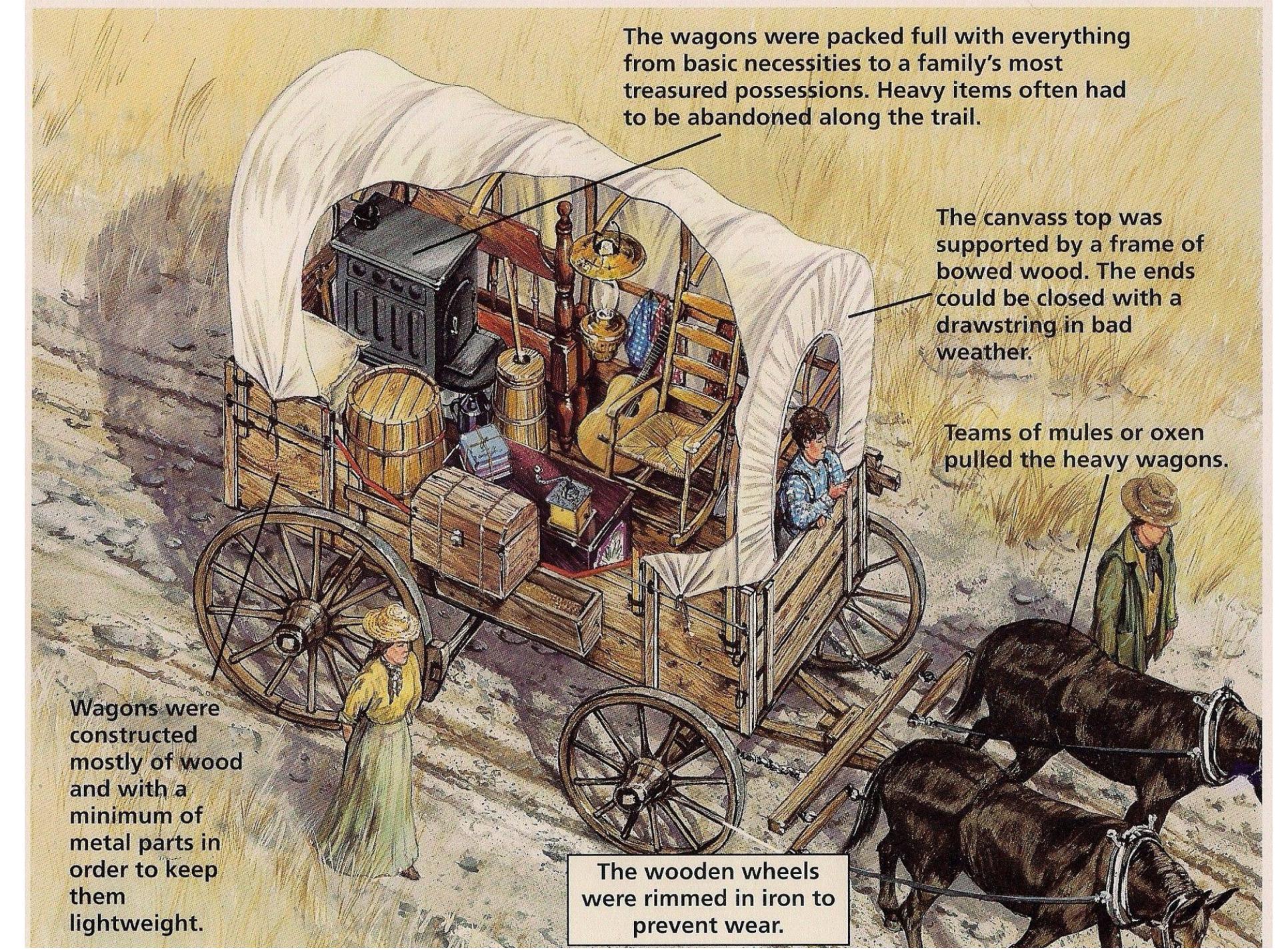
Resources:

Page 21 of textbook

What to take on the Oregon Trail

Additional research of your own





The wagons were packed full with everything from basic necessities to a family's most treasured possessions. Heavy items often had to be abandoned along the trail.

The canvass top was supported by a frame of bowed wood. The ends could be closed with a drawstring in bad weather.

Teams of mules or oxen pulled the heavy wagons.

Wagons were constructed mostly of wood and with a minimum of metal parts in order to keep them lightweight.

The wooden wheels were rimmed in iron to prevent wear.



The Knight family

The Knight family, Joel and Amelia and their seven children, set out from Iowa in 1853. They were bound for Oregon, and on their journey Amelia kept a daily diary. This gives historians invaluable insight into the pioneer experience of the Oregon Trail.

Source E Selected and shortened diary entries of Amelia Stewart Knight

Saturday, 9 April, 1853
Started from home about 11 o'clock and travelled 8 miles

Monday, 18 April Cold; breaking fast the first thing; very disagreeable weather; wind east, cold and rainy, no fire. We are on a very large prairie; no timber can be seen as far as the eye can reach. Evening. Have crossed several bad streams today, and more than once have been stuck in mud.

Thursday, 21 April Rained all night; is still raining. I have just counted 17 wagons travelling ahead of us in the mud and water. No feed for our poor stock to be got at any price. Have to feed them flour and meal. Travelled 22 miles today.

Saturday, 23 April Still in camp, it rained hard all night, and blew a hurricane almost. All the tents were blown down, and some wagons capsized.

Friday, 29 April Cool and pleasant, saw first Indians today. Luey and Almira afraid and run into wagon to hide.



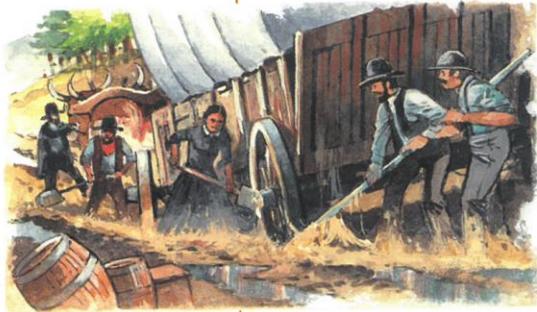
Friday, 6 May Pleasant. We have just passed the Mormon graveyard. There is a great number of graves in it. The road is covered with wagons and cattle.

Saturday, 7 May Cold morning, thermometer down to 48 in the wagon. No wood, only enough to boil some coffee. Good grass for the stock. We have crossed a small creek, with a narrow Indian bridge across it. Paid the Indians 75 cents toll. My hands are numb with cold.

Wednesday, 11 May Evening. It has been very dusty yesterday and today. The men all have their false eyes on to keep the dust out. We are travelling up Platte River bottom, on the north side.

Saturday, 14 May Had a fine rain last night; laid the dust, cool and the sun shines this morning. We see very few Indians. Did not see more than a dozen Pawnees. We are now in the Sioux country. Passed the sand bluffs. Travelled 2 miles and were obliged to stop

and camp on the prairie, on account of the high winds. Winds so high that we dare not make a fire, impossible to pitch the tent, the wagons could hardly stand the wind. All that find room are crowded into the wagons; those that can't have to stay out in the storm.



ACTIVITIES

- 1 Trace Amelia's route to Oregon on Figure 2.2 on page 26. Write an account of her journey that explains the hazards and difficulties that the pioneers had to overcome.
- 2 What can you learn about pioneers' attitudes to Indians from Amelia's diary?

Tuesday, 7 June Rained some last night; quite warm today. Just passed Fort Laramie. This afternoon we passed a large village of Sioux Indians. Numbers of them came around our wagons. Some of the women had moccasins and beads, which they wanted to trade for bread. I gave the women and children all the cakes I had baked.

Tuesday, 21 June We have travelled over a very rough, rocky road today; over mountains close to banks of snow. Had plenty of snow water to drink. We are travelling through the South Pass.

Tuesday, 28 June Still in camp waiting to cross [Big Sandy River]. As far as the eye can reach it is nothing but sandy desert and the road is strewn with dead cattle, and the stench is awful.

Monday, 4 July It has been very warm today. Thermometer up to 110, and yet we can see banks of snow almost within reach. I never saw mosquitoes as bad as they are here. Chat (a son) has been sick all day with fever, partly caused by mosquito bites.

Saturday, 9 July We passed the forks of the emigrants' road yesterday noon, after leaving the California road. We find the grass much better, as most of the large trains are bound for California.

Monday, 18 July Camped on Rock Creek. It is here the Indians are so troublesome. I was very much frightened while at this camp. I lay awake all night. I expected every minute we would be killed. However, we all found our scalps on in the morning. There are people killed at this place every year.

Thursday, 21 July Afternoon – Came 12 miles and have camped close to the ferry. Our turn will come to cross in the night. Have to pay 4 dollars a wagon, cross on a ferryboat, and swim the stock, which is a very hard job, on such a large river. Indians all around our wagons.

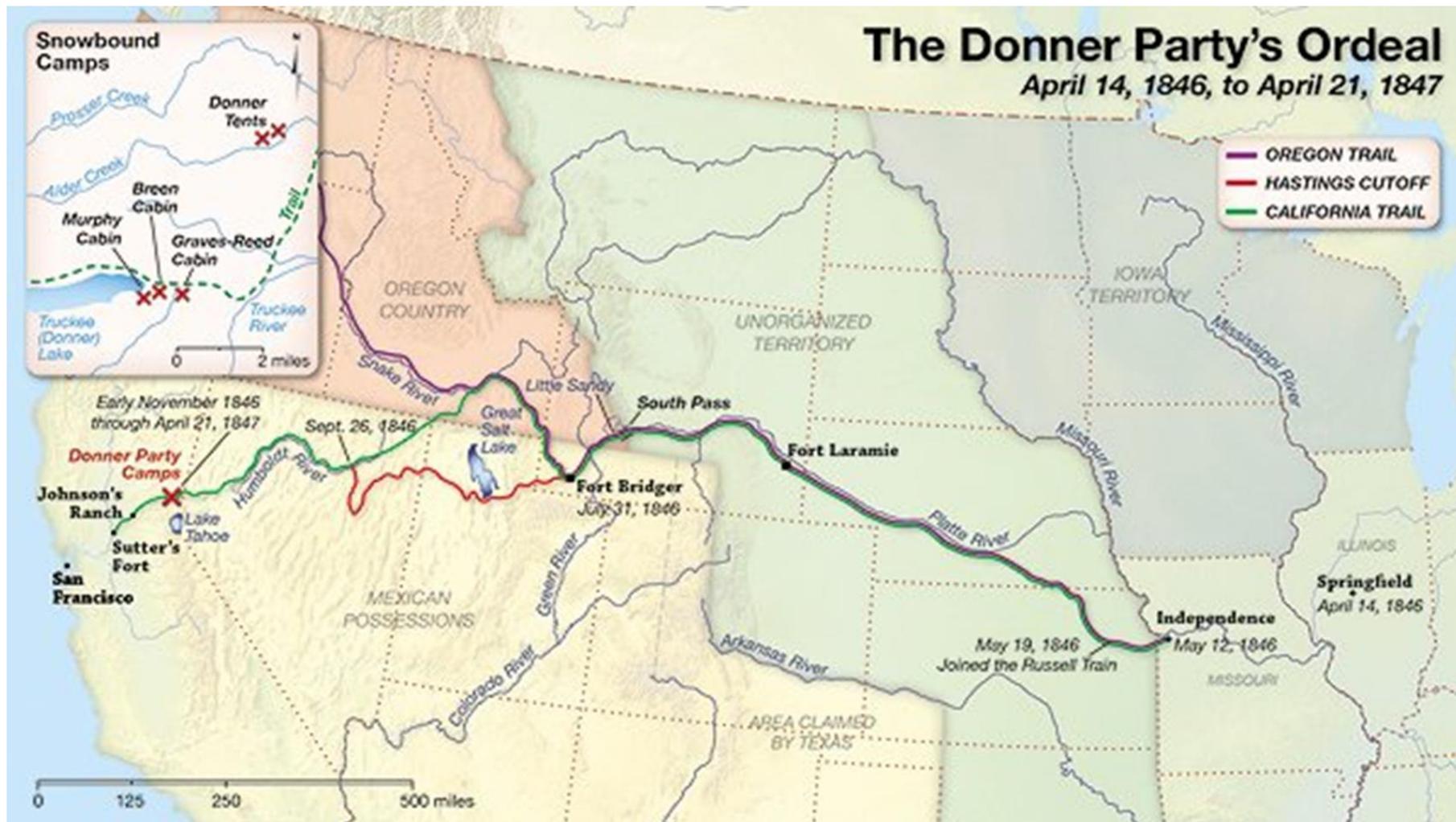
Thursday, 4 August We have passed Reed's River. It is deep fording but, by raising the wagon beds about a foot, and being very careful, we are all landed safe. Have seen a good many Indians and bought fish of them. They all seem peaceable and friendly.

Tuesday, 6 September Still in camp, washing and overhauling the wagons to make them as light as possible to cross the mountains. Evening – After throwing away a good many things and burning up most of the deck boards of our wagons so as to lighten them, got my washing and cooking done and started on again.

Saturday, 17 September Evening. Came six miles and have encamped in a fence corner by a Mr. Lambert's, about seven miles from Milwaukie. Turn our stock out to tolerable good feed. A few days later my eighth child was born. After this we picked up and ferried across the Columbia River, utilizing skiff, canoes and flatboat to get across, taking three days to complete. Here husband traded two yoke of oxen for a half section of land with one-half acre planted to potatoes and a small log cabin and lean-to with no windows. This is the journey's end.



Task: A Case study of the Donner Party – a detailed look



Use the information you have been given to put the events in chronological order and arrange around the map appropriately to show the disastrous Donner party Experience

Task: A Case study of the Donner Party – a detailed look

3

This 'short cut' was anything but. There were no markings, no ruts of previous wagons to follow and the terrain was rocky with steep slopes and canyons. There were difficult rivers to cross with no designated crossing points like on the Oregon trail. There were also stretches of desert with no forts to take on provisions. Took a month longer to go this way before reconnecting with the main trail to California!

2

At Fort Bridger the group split. 80 people, including the Donner brothers wanted to try a new short cut that a trail guide named Lansford Hastings claimed would cut 550km off the established route. Despite the fact he had not actually tried the route for himself they decided to trust him. The remainder of the party did not want to risk it and continued on the established trail.

4

Constant arguments ranged as to press on or turn back. Fights started. One member of the party (James Reed) killed another in self defence and was banished. The exhausted group reached the Sierra Nevada mountains in mid October.

5

By November the exhausted Oxen had dragged the wagons high into the mountains but before they could cross the pass the snow came earlier than usual and trapped them.

6

The remaining animals died and eventually food ran out. They resorted to eating bones, bark and twigs. The first person died of starvation on 15th Dec.

7

When rescuers (including James Reed who had been banished) finally found them in February only half were still alive and those survivors had resorted to eating the flesh of those who has died. Two Indian Guides who had been helping them were butchered for refusing to eat human flesh. James Reed's wife and 4 children were still alive. Neither Donner brother was.

8

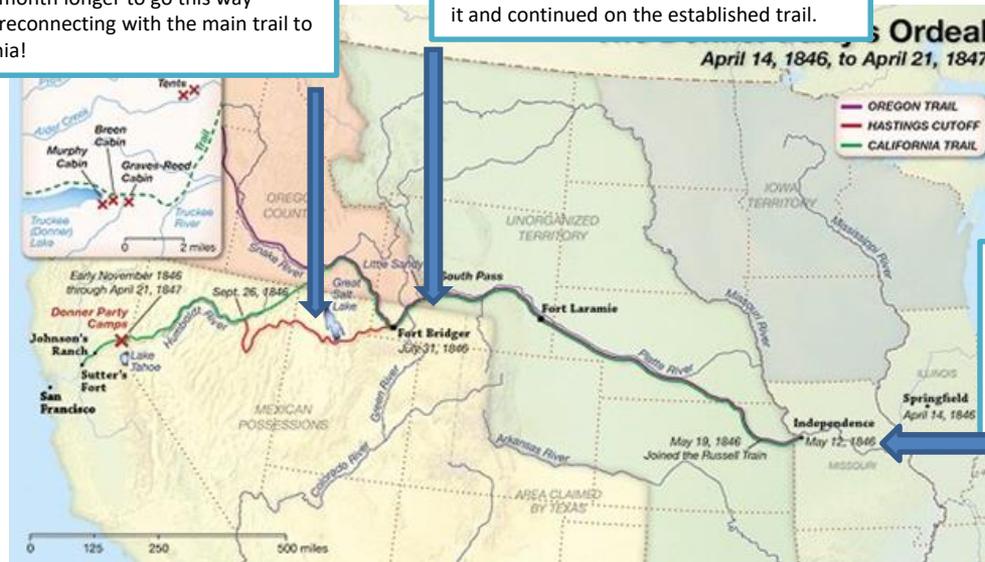
A description by one of those in the rescue party (Captain Fellun)
"A horrible scene presented itself. Human bodies terribly mutilated, legs, arms and skull scattered in every direction. At the mouth of a tent stood a large kettle (cooking pot), filled with human flesh cut up, it was the body of George Donner. His head had been split open and the brains extracted."

9

News of their suffering and in particular the sensational story of cannibalism spread east and was a factor in the fall off in the numbers heading west in the following year.

1

May 1846 – A party led by Jacob and George Donner left Independence and made good initial progress. 60 wagons and over 300 people made up the Donner Party. They were well equipped but contained more older people and children than was usual.



Exam Question (8 marks)

- ***Write a narrative account analysing why Americans went West in the years 1836 – 1849.***
You may use the following in your answer:
 - The Oregon Trail from 1836
 - The Californian Gold Rush 1849
 - You must also use information of your own.



You will need to write an organised answer, putting events into the correct chronological order (get revising those timelines!). You need to show how each event is connected to and led to the next event. You will need to explain **THREE** events in your narrative.

Events to Think about:

The Oregon Trail

Californian Gold Rush

Economic Depression in the East

California becomes US territory

Oregon becomes US territory

Government Encouragement (Pre emption Act)

Any others?

Step1: Put these events in chronological order and match the dates to the event

1837

From 1836

1849

1842

1848

1846



Step 2 - Decide which three events you want to include in your answer

Analytical narratives are NOT stories.

The analytical narrative, as well as linking events, also makes clear what followed on from them and what difference they made.

The use of process words and phrases show that something was happening and therefore suggest the impact.

Practice selecting key events, sequencing them and linking them into a process that explains an outcome.

Key phrases/words
for a historical
narrative to
demonstrate links:

- therefore
- because of this...
- thus...
- in order to...
- as a consequence...
- hence...
- this led to...
- combined with...
- as a result...

Process words:

- began
- became
- developed
- changed
- realised
- ended
- intensified
 - grew
 - followed
 - worsened
 - improved
 - increased
 - reinforced
 - encouraged
- deteriorated
 - despite

Level	Mark	Descriptor
	0	No rewardable material.
1	1–2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A simple or generalised narrative is provided; the account shows limited analysis and organisation of the events included. [AO2] • Limited knowledge and understanding of the events is shown. [AO1]
2	3–5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A narrative is given, showing some organisation of material into a sequence of events leading to an outcome. The account of events shows some analysis of the linkage between them, but some passages of the narrative may lack coherence and organisation. [AO2] • Accurate and relevant information is added, showing some knowledge and understanding of the events. [AO1] <p><i>Maximum 4 marks for answers that do not go beyond aspects prompted by the stimulus points.</i></p>
3	6–8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A narrative is given which organises material into a clear sequence of events leading to an outcome. The account of events analyses the linkage between them and is coherent and logically structured. [AO2] • Accurate and relevant information is included, showing good knowledge and understanding of the key features or characteristics of the events. [AO1] <p><i>No access to Level 3 for answers which do not go beyond aspects prompted by the stimulus points.</i></p>

WAGOLL

- *An important first development in the early settlement of the West was the **opening of the Oregon Trail** which was used by people other than explorers and fur trappers from **1836**. **Due to** the opening of this trail it became possible for settlers to cross the Plains and find a route through the Rocky Mountains to Oregon and California. **As a consequence** of this route being established, increasing numbers of people began to head West and by 1846 over 5,000 people had made the journey.*
- *This new access, **combined with economic depression** in the east from **1837** **encouraged** more Americans to brave the trail and head for a new life West.....*



n Trail 1836.



n Trail 1836.



n Trail 1836.



n Trail 1836.



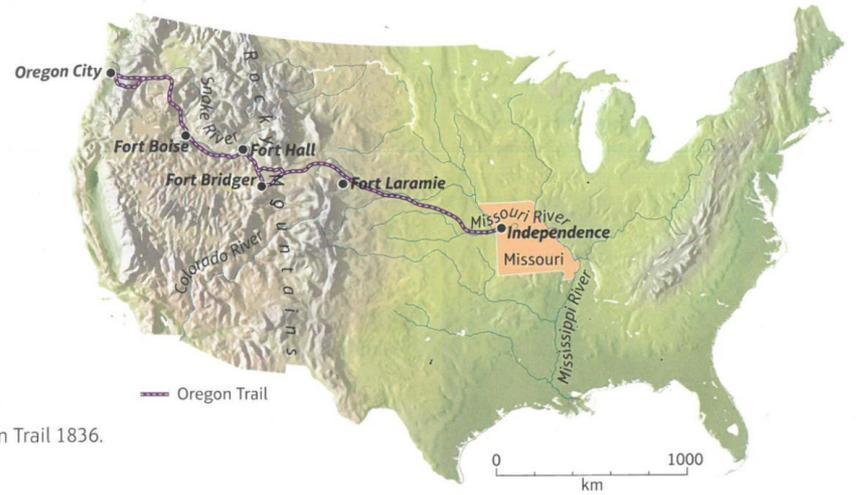
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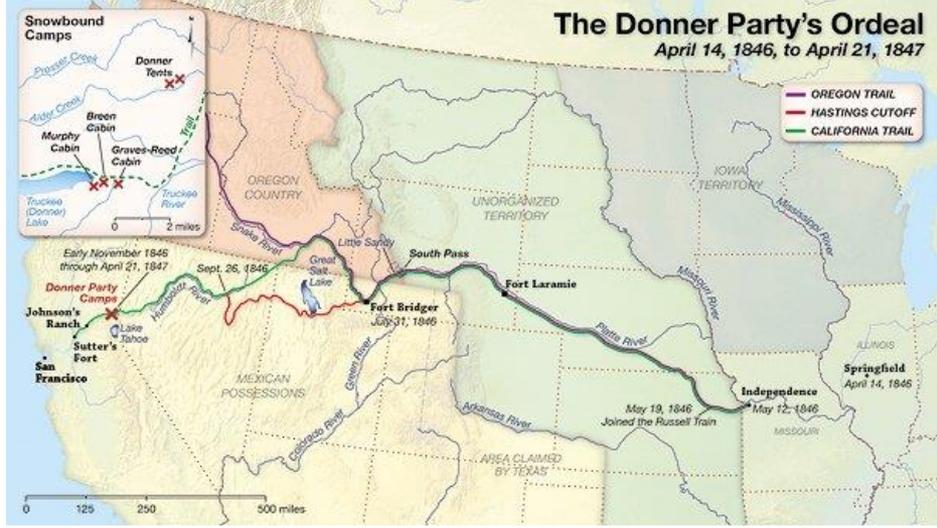
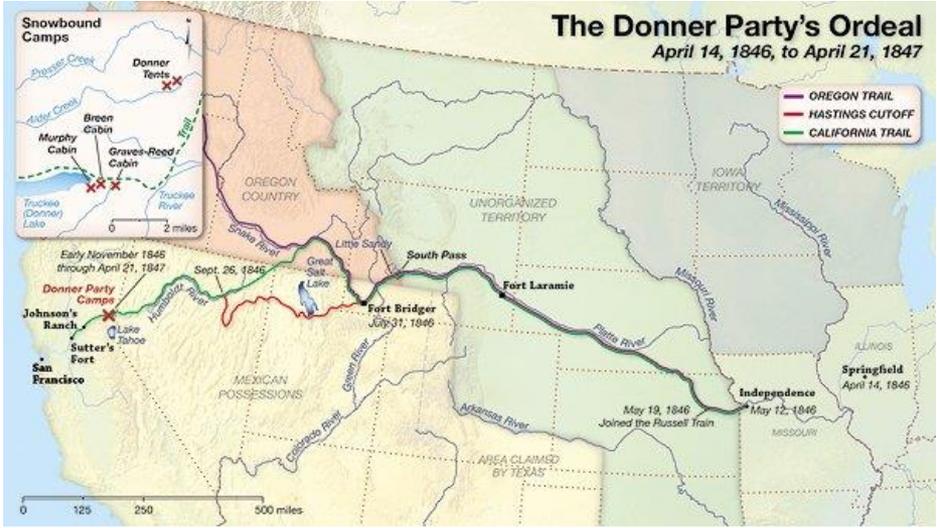
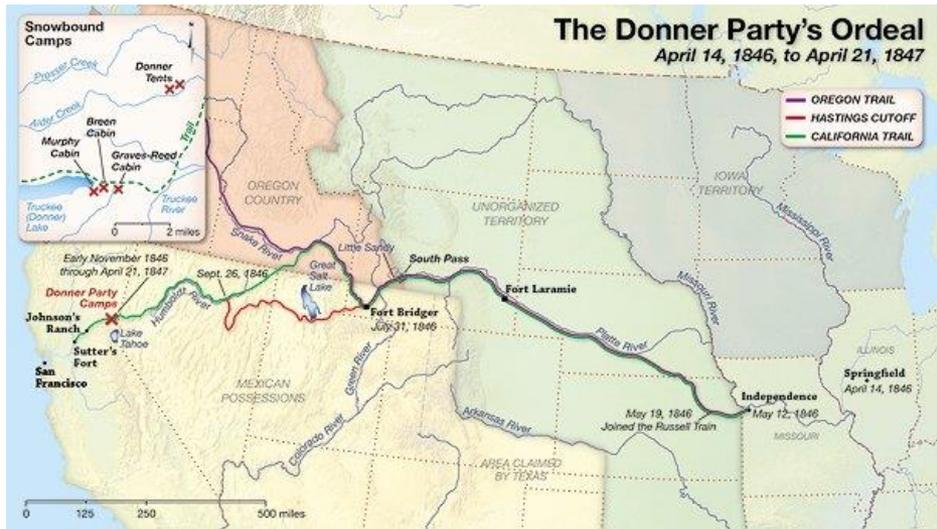
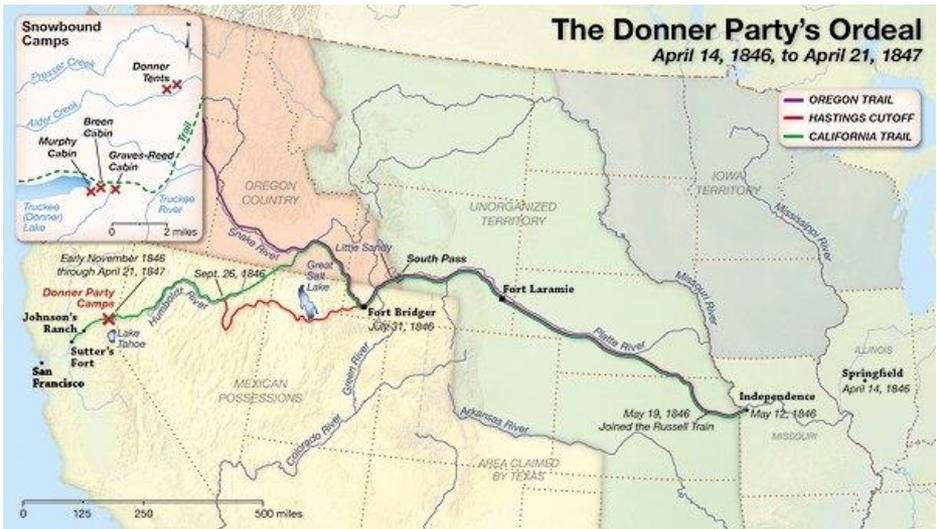
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