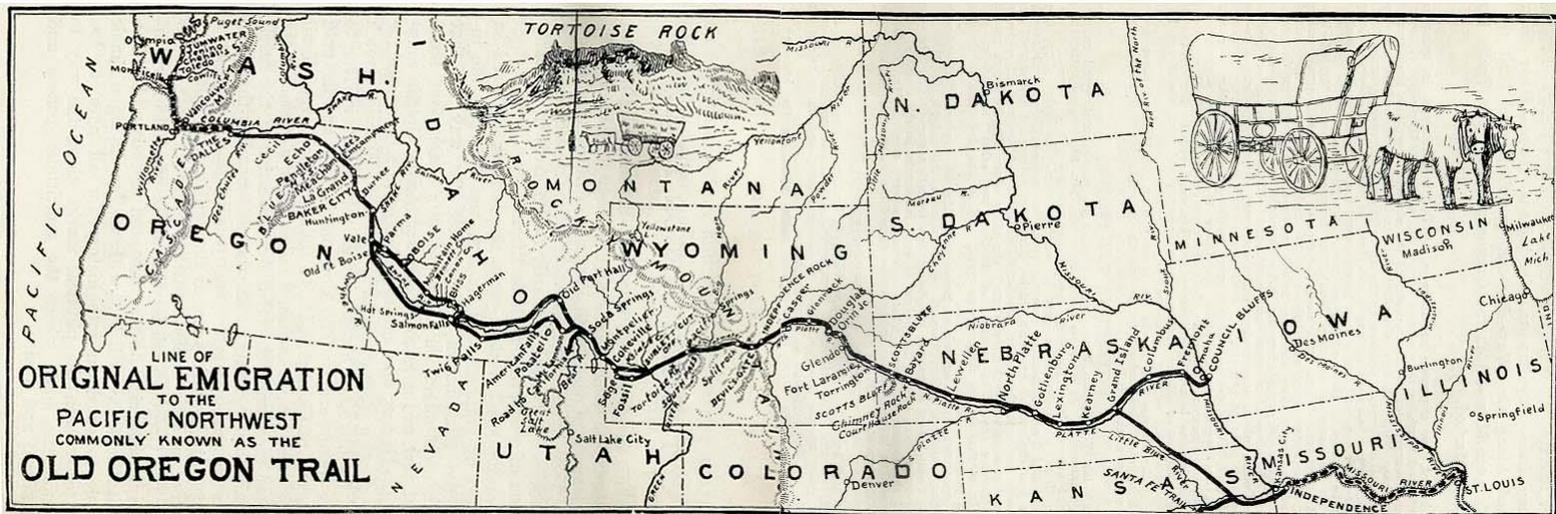


Wagons West

What should my class do before we visit?

1. **Discuss.** Ask your students; “What is a Museum?” Explain that they will be visiting a history museum! What do they think history is?
2. **Read.** Read the letter below from Jennifer Smith, a girl whose journey they will be following as she and her family travel westward.
3. **Read.** Read Jennifer Smith’s diary entries, and answer the reflection questions together.
4. **Brainstorm.** Why would people want to move westward? If given the choice, would you want to go on this journey? Why or why not?
5. **Look.** Look together at the map of the Oregon Trail below.



Wagons West

November 21, 1852

Dear Class,

You are going to visit The Long Island Museum for a program called *Wagons West*. During the visit you will learn about the exciting but scary journey that my family is planning.

Let me tell you about my family and myself so that you'll be better prepared to help us. My name is Jennifer Smith and I am 10 years old and I have a brother named John who is 12. I now live on a farm north of Bloomington, Illinois with my mother, father and brother. My mother and father moved to this area from Stony Brook, L.I. in 1839, just after they married. My parents had been expecting to live here the rest of their lives. However, about two months ago my father met a man who had been out to the Oregon Territory and was raving about the rich farmland and beautiful scenery. After a month of talking, Father has finally persuaded the rest of the family to sell the farm, leave Illinois, and start a new life in the rich farmland of the Willamette Valley in the Oregon Territory.

The Oregon Territory is very far away. We will have to travel 2000 miles along the Oregon Trail to get there. Father says we are going to leave from St. Joseph, Missouri with other families in a wagon train. To get to St. Joseph's from our home in Illinois, we have to take a stagecoach to Chicago, Illinois, where we will catch a ride on the newly built railroad that will take us to St. Joseph. There we will purchase our wagon, supplies and several yoke of oxen.

We look forward to your visit. Maybe you will think of other things we should include for our long journey. See you soon!

Sincerely yours,
Jennifer Smith

Wagons West

Ten Days from the Diary of Jennifer Smith January through March, 1854

January 12

Dear Diary,

Me and my best friend Susie decided to keep a diary. We write our secret thoughts and what we do. Since this is my first day, I will write my name, Jennifer Smith. I am ten years old. I live on a farm with my mother, my father, and my brother John. After my mother and father got married they moved from a town called Stony Brook in the state of New York. They bought this farm a little way up from Bloomington, Illinois. John and I were born here. I love our farm. I want to live here forever.

January 13

Dear Diary,

I help my mother keep house. John helps father take care of the fields and the animals. Father lets John ride Nellie, our good old work horse. Mother teaches me to cook and sew. This morning I made biscuits. John said they were not as good as mother's, but father said they were fine.

January 15

Dear Diary,

After school today I finished a dress for Miss Maryanne. It is just like mine, only little. Miss Maryanne is my doll. Mother made her for me. I will be glad when school is over. Me and John are in the same classroom with other farm children. Some of them are older and bigger. There are some little ones too. Our teacher is nice most of the time but we are tired of memorizing names and dates and arithmetic problems and sometimes poems.

January 30

Dear Diary,

Father left early today to go to Bloomington. Mother gave him a list of things she needs from the general store. When he came home, they stayed up late tonight talking and talking. I wonder why. John thinks they have a surprise for us.

Wagons West

February 5

Dear Diary,

Mother and father finally told us what they are planning. Father met a man in Bloomington who told of wonderful things happening way out in the Northwest Territories. Lots of people are getting together and moving out west. Anyone can get free acres for a farm out there. Even women can own land. The man said no one lives there, and I asked my father if that was true. Father said well, hardly anybody. John asked if just anyone can get the free land. Father said almost anyone. I asked if we are going there too. Mother said that is the plan. We have lots to do to get ready to leave by springtime. I am not sure if I feel glad or worried.

February 6

Dear Diary,

Father told us about the prairies and the mountains. Prairie grass is taller than we are. The mountains seem to touch the sky. It is hard to believe how different these places are from where we live. Father said Illinois used to be all prairieland. Now it is mostly farms. I wish we had some pretty paintings especially of the mountains. I have never seen a mountain. John asked if we will meet any Indians. Father said maybe. Maybe they will have things to trade.

February 8

Dear Diary,

It is really true. We are going to the Willamette Valley in Oregon. Willamette. What a pretty name. It must be a pretty place. We will be leaving the United States. That is scary. The Oregon Territory is 2000 miles from here. It will take about six months to get there. SIX MONTHS IS HALF A YEAR. Half a year is a really long, long time.

Wagons West

February 10

Dear Diary,

Father sold the farm and the big machines he uses to work the land. He said we need money to buy everything we need for at least six months. Mother is packing things we need on the trip and even after, when we get to the Willamette Valley. She said she has to remember big things like quilts and little things like medicines. She told John and me we can take only what is useful and what will help us keep up with our schoolwork. We can also take a few things for fun and to help us remember our home. I am so glad Miss Maryanne can come with me. I hope I will not get sick on the trip. The medicines mother gives us taste very, very bad. And they smell funny.

February 25

Dear Diary,

We are almost ready to leave. Almost. First we will go to Chicago by stagecoach. MY FIRST RIDE IN A STAGECOACH! Then we go to St. Joseph, Missouri. Everyone calls it St. Jo. We go to St. Jo by train. I HAVE NEVER SEEN A TRAIN! In St. Jo we buy our wagon and oxen and food and everything else we need for the trip. Now I can hardly wait.

March 2

Dear Diary,

I did not know how hard it is so hard to say goodbye to Honey and Sweetie our cats and Big Boy our dog. I walked around the house and the farm. It is hard to believe I will never see them again. I cried when I said goodbye to Susie. Mother said maybe someday soon her family will move to Oregon too. I know we are going on a wonderful adventure. I still feel sad to leave and a little bit scared sometimes. Mostly I feel excited. I just cannot wait to see all those new and beautiful places. Now I am truly ready to go.

Wagons West

Reflection Questions

1. Why does Jennifer's family want to move out West?
2. How is Oregon territory different from Illinois?
3. Are there really no other people living in Oregon?
4. How long will it take Jennifer's family to get to Oregon territory?
5. What sort of things will Jennifer's family take with them on the journey?
6. What stops will Jennifer's family make on their journey out West?



A Family and Their Schooner Wagon

Wagons West

What should my class do after the visit?

1. **Think back.** What stations did you visit on your journey? What did you have to do to prepare for a trip out west?
2. **Brainstorm.** The trip out west was very difficult and dangerous. Was it worth it? Why did people risk everything to go? Was the journey different than you expected? If so, how?
3. **Discuss.** What are your thoughts? Knowing what you do about the treacherous journey, if you were given the choice to go out West back then, would you have done it? Why or why not? As a class, make a list of pros and cons of staying home vs. going west – and then take a vote!
4. **Write.** Compose a persuasive paragraph arguing your opinion. Why should your family go west **or** why should your family stay home?



A Typical Wagon Train