



Wagons West

What is the *Wagons West* Program?

This two-hour program recreates the activities of 19th century family preparing for a trip across the United States on the Oregon Trail. Students help a fictional 19th century family prepare for their trip from Bloomington, Illinois to the Oregon Territory. They will select and pack the family belongings and learn about the difficulties of stagecoach and train travel. In the Samuel West Blacksmith Shop, students are introduced to the craft of wheelwrighting and its importance in the construction of the Prairie Schooner. Finally, students are invited to purchase the supplies for their trip to Oregon. Using a scale model wagon and supplies, students attempt to load all the necessary items for their trip. In so doing, they draw conclusions about the challenges of travel along the Oregon Trail.

How does the *Wagons West* Program fit into my curriculum?

Students participating in this program will gain a better understanding of American westward migration and settlement. The program enriches the social studies curriculum by helping students distinguish the differences between present day travel and that of the 19th century. By following a pioneer family, students explore the economic and social causes of westward migration and its effect on American society.

What should my class do before we visit?

- In preparation, please read the following fictional letter to the class.

January 12, 1854

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 will 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 team of oxen.

I can't wait to meet you so that you can help us choose the best kind of wagon and the important supplies to buy for our trip. Maybe you will think of things we should include on our long journey that we have forgotten. See you soon!

Sincerely yours,
Jennifer Smith

- Establish the time frame by using a time line. See <http://www.endoftheoregontrail.org/road2oregon/sa09chrono.html> for a suggested time line.
- Study the route of the Oregon Trail. A useful map may be found at <http://www.endoftheoregontrail.org/maplib.html>
- Review "Tips for Stagecoach Travelers" which may be found at http://www.goldledge.com/history/docs_html/stagetips.html.
- Part of the program is in an unheated blacksmith shop; please ask students to dress appropriately.

What should my class do after we visit?

- Have your students write a week of diary entries for either John or Jennifer that describe daily experiences while traveling on the Oregon Trail.
- Have students compile a list of their prized possessions that they would include in a small box for a six-month journey across the country today.
- Have the entire class create a topographical map made from clay showing the regions of the United States crossed by the Oregon Trail and mark the trail on your map.
- If one of your students has moved recently from one part of the country to another, have him or her describe the experience. Have the class compare it to the emigrant experience of the Oregon pioneers.
- Have each student create a model prairie schooner.
- Have students write a travel brochure that encourages emigration to the Oregon Territory.