

Open Up the Textbook (OUT)

Enlarge

Complicate

Contest

Vivify

Title: Wagon Trains and the Forty-Mile Desert

Authors: Bree Evans, Geri Moore, Erica Pienkoski, Johnna Ramos, Michael Raybourn, Lisa Smith, Amy Stover, Melissa Pruyn

Standards: (Reading for Informational Text: RI 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9) & (Social Studies: H1.4.4, H2.4.2, H2.4.4, G5.4.2)

In this OUT analysis, 4th grade students will study dangers faced by people traveling on the trail west. This OUT analysis provides students with documents that are meant to deliberately complicate and vivify the textbook.

This strategy is implemented most effectively when students collaborate to analyze the texts in small, heterogeneous groups. The texts that accompany the textbook are complex and often include difficult vocabulary and syntax. (For a few words that are likely unknown to students and unidentifiable based upon context clues, helpful synonyms are provided in the footnotes.) Students should first annotate each text and then collaborate to answer the text dependent and specific questions that follow. Questions will highlight sourcing and perspective of the author, close reading of key details from the document that enlarge, complicate, contest, or vivify the textbook, as well as questions that help students corroborate (or not) the accuracy of individual documents. The culminating task that follows, provides students an opportunity to share their knowledge about the topic by choosing a writing assignment. They will employ evidence from multiple sources to justify their analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Source A: The Textbook – *Nevada: Our Home*, G.P. BeDunnah et al., pages 87-88

Dangers on the Trail

Moving west was an exciting adventure, but it was also very hard. Every day there were problems and dangers to face. Week after week, pioneers walked in the dust and heat. When it rained, wagon wheels were often stuck in the mud. Many pioneers died along the trail because of freezing temperatures and deep snows.

Weather was just one of the many problems people faced during their travels west. Some got lost because the trails they followed were not marked. Others drifted off course while trying to follow maps made by early explorers or traders. Pioneers also had to protect themselves from bear, mountain lion, or other wild animal attacks.

Another problem people faced was unfriendly Indian tribes. Most tribes were friendly at first. They traded with the pioneers for goods, food, and other supplies. But as more wagon trains came west, some Indians began to attack the settlers. They wanted to stop the settlers from harming the land and the animals the tribes depended on for food.

Indian tribes and pioneers lived very different lives. Their ways of life did not always work well together. Indian tribes believed their way of life was in danger.

Forty-Mile Desert

Crossing western deserts in the summer heat was one of the hardest things pioneers had to do. Nevada's Forty-Mile Desert was probably the worst. After leaving the western edge of the Humboldt River, wagon trains had to travel 40 miles before reaching water again.

Many pioneers knew the Forty-Mile Desert would be hard to cross. They knew their animals would not be able to pull heavy wagons that far without water. Many of them had to get rid of their belongings to make their wagons lighter. Sometimes they left things, like furniture, scattered along the desert trail.

Source A Questions for Consideration

1. Discuss with a partner the different dangers pioneer families faced while moving west. Then, list 3 pieces of evidence from the text to support what you discussed.
2. How did the attitude of the Indians change as the pioneers continued to settle on their land?
3. The author states that crossing the Forty-mile Desert was "one of the hardest things pioneers had to do." What in your life can you compare this journey to: moving, a road trip, camping, other? Nothing? Explain your thinking.

Source C: Primary Source, newspaper – “Distressing News”, California Star Newspaper, February 13, 1847

Distressing² news by Captain J.A. Sutter’s launch which arrived here a few days since from Fort Sacramento- we received a letter from a friend at that place, containing a most distressing account of the situation of the emigrants in the mountains, who were prevented from crossing them by the snow-and of a party of eleven who attempted to come into the valley on foot.

The following **particulars**³ we extracted from the letter by J.A. Sutter: The Company is composed of twenty-three wagons, and is a part of Col. Russell’s company, that left the **rendezvous**⁴ on Indian Creek near The Missouri line on the 13th day of May last. They arrived at Fort Bridger in good time, some two weeks earlier than the last company on the road. From that point they took the new road by the south end of the Great Salt Lake, which was then being marked out by some seventy five wagons with Messrs. Hastings and Headpath as pilots.

They followed on in the wagon train until they were near the “Weber River canon,” and within some 4 or 5 days travel of the leading wagons, when they stopped and sent on three men to request Mr. Hastings to go back and show them the pack trail from the Red Fork of Weber River to the Lake. Mr. Hastings went back and showed them the trail, and then returned to our company, all of which time we remained in camp waiting for Mr. Hastings to show us the rout.

They then commenced making the new road over the Lake on the pack trail, so as to avoid the Weber River canon, and Mr. Reed and others, who left the company, and came in for **assistance**,⁵ informed me that they were 16 days making the road. Had they gone on the road that we had made for them, they would have easily **overtaken**⁶ us before we reached Old Mary’s River. They were travelling slow, on account of having to make an entire new rout for several hundred miles through heavy sage and over mountains. Had they gone around the old road, the north end of the Great Salt Lake, they would have been in the settlement in the first of September instead of October.

After crossing the long drive of 75 miles without water or grass, and suffering much from their loss of oxen, they sent two men to Sutter’s fort for mules and food supplies. Mr. Reed was also sent ahead to Sutter’s and arrived exhausted from starvation. He returned as far as Bear River valley and found snow so deep, that he could not get to the company. He **cached**⁷ the provisions there and returned.

We heard nothing of the company, until last week, when a messenger was sent down from Captain William Johnson’s settlement, with astounding information that five women and two men had arrived at that point entirely naked, their feet frost bitten- and informed them that the company arrived within three miles of the small log cabin near Trucky’s Lake on the east side of the mountains, and found the snow so deep that they could not travel, fearing starvation.

² distressing-to cause great pain or sorrow; anxiety; trouble

³ particulars-belonging to an individual part; item; point

⁴ Rendezvous-meeting or gathering place

⁵ assistance-help, aid

⁶ overtaken-come upon suddenly

⁷ cached-hiding place for food or other things

Source C Questions for Consideration

1. Why do you think the author used the word “distressing” to introduce this article? What is the “distressing news”?
2. What can you infer the people reading the article were thinking or feeling? Cite examples as evidence for your support.
3. The article mentioned several complications that arose during the trip. Discuss some of those complications.

Source D: Secondary Source, Map



Source D Questions for Consideration

1. Using the map on page 93 of Nevada, Our Home as a guide, draw in the 40 Mile Desert on the map above.
2. a. What features do you see on the map above?

b. What does this help you understand about Nevada?

c. How might these features make traveling by wagon trains difficult or dangerous for settlers?

d. What features in the topography would aid the settlers as they traveled across Nevada?
3. On the map above, trace what you consider to be the best travel route from East to West. Explain why you chose that route.

(Teacher note – you may want to add current cities, towns, features to compare to this).

Source E: Primary Source, photograph

Please access the “Wagon Train Zoom In” lesson under 4th grade resources at:
www.projecttahoe.org

Student Writing Task

Standards: Writing: It will depend on which job they choose. Their culminating activity can be persuasive, informative or narrative. All writing will include W4.4, 7, 8, and 9. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the texts as well as the ways in which the textbook was complicated and vivified.

Teacher note: Students choose one culminating activity to demonstrate their knowledge of the texts.

1. You are a settler who has just completed the journey west. Write a letter to a friend or family member back home, persuading them to either take or not take the journey west. Your letter must include 3-5 pieces of evidence from 2-3 of the sources provided that supports your opinion why they should or should not take the journey.
2. Make a warning poster that demonstrates the problems with choosing to journey west. Your poster should include examples from the texts with pictorial support.
3. Create a 1-2 minutes newscast about your experiences traveling west across the Forty-mile Desert. (Standards: SL3, SL4, SL5, W.4.6)