

# Lesson Title: Economic Choices for Exploring the Frontier

Lesson Design by: Brian Swink, Eugene Field Elementary School, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade  
July 2005

## Teaching Traditional American History Program

Funded by U.S. Department of Education

Mike Lair, Project Director

<http://www.chillhistoryproject.com/>

Lesson Overview: *This lesson challenges students to put themselves in the place of pioneers hoping to build a homestead and gold rush participants by looking at the financial challenges they faced in establishing themselves on the frontier. .*

Objectives: After completing this lesson the student will be able to:

- explain the hardship of economic limitations in Westward Expansion
- describe the effects of fluctuations in supply and demand

Materials:

1. PowerPoint of Great Plains pictures
2. SMARTBoard or Internet ready computer access for students
3. Independence Square Activity supply sheet
4. Independence Square Activity recording sheet
5. Group Member Evaluation
6. Scissors
7. Calculators (1 per group of 4 students)
8. Pencils

Class Time: 90 minutes

Teacher Input:

1. Start the PowerPoint showing pictures taken throughout the great plains and get students talking about what would have drawn people west into an unsettled territory. (Gold, Cattle trade, Railroad, Farming, Land, Fur)
2. Prepare students to make economic decisions by reading the Westward Expansion story from the U.S. Mint kids' page time machine located here: <http://www.usmint.gov/kids/timemachine/E4/erastory.html>
3. Review Questions:
  - a. Why would people leave their jobs/homes to hunt for gold? (Much more money could be earned in a very short time)
  - b. What two items had prices that surprised the main character? (Flour and shovel)
  - c. What caused people to pay more for these items? (Many people

- were demanding these items, so store owners were able to charge much more for them due to the demand)
4. Now that students are thinking about money and the west, and they have an idea of some of the prices, begin discussing homesteaders. It was rarely the rich who were established who traveled west. It was equally rare for poor families to attempt the journey to escape hardship due to the staggering cost of supplies to head west. I show an overhead of just the supply list from the Independence Square Activity supply list at this point.
  5. Read through the list with students, defining the following terms:
    - a. Yoke-wooden frame holding two oxen together in place
    - b. Yeast-makes bread rise, unless you like flat bread
    - c. Lard-animal fat used for cooking
    - d. Gross-12 dozen, or 144 units
    - e. Keg-large barrel
    - f. Coffee mill-used to grind the beans to make coffee
    - g. Drawing knife-tool used to shave wood
    - h. Chisel-tool used to shape wood
    - i. Auger-tool for drilling holes
    - j. Gimlet-small tool for drilling holes
    - k. Whetstone-stone used to sharpen knives
  6. Break students up into groups of four with the following roles:
    - a. Recorder - keeps list of supplies purchased
    - b. Store Keeper – Keeps a running total of the order
    - c. Timekeeper – Encourages group to stay on task and finish within 25 minutes
    - d. Leader – Reads instructions and makes sure rules are followed throughout activity
  7. Groups get 25 minutes to decide what must go and what stays behind, while keeping to a strict budget. When time is called, complete a survey of the class using the overhead to determine how many groups purchased each item. This will spur discussion as to why certain groups left certain items behind. This lends itself to reviewing scarcity, when you can't have everything you want.
  8. Collect each group's list from the recorder.

Activities:

1. Students read an online comic book style story about the California Gold Rush
2. In groups, students work cooperatively to choose items needed for moving a family west during the period of westward expansion.

Questions for review:

- Q) How did your group decide what to buy and what to go on without?
- Q) Of the items your group left behind, what would be the hardest to live without?
- Q) List five items that would have been impossible to travel without
  - A) oxen, wagon, food, cooking supplies, plates, cups, flatware, pics, shovels, axes
- Q) How were the needs of gold miners different than that of the homesteaders?

Closure: *Just like the pioneers had to budget to get what they wanted, the same economic choices exist today. Families today must decide how their income can be spent. Q) Has your family ever forced you to make a choice in how money is spent? A) Answers will vary but often include limiting sports involvement, entertainment options, Christmas spending, etc. If discussion is slow to start, enlist the class' help in listing everything money is spent on for the families represented. Soon they will see a list develop not unlike the daunting list of supplies needed to move the pioneers west. After totaling the estimates to keep a family going for one month, I would ask students what they could do if the family income fell by \$400, or even half the total representing the loss of a job. Sometimes income doesn't change, but prices for necessary items increase due to supply/demand such as recent gasoline prices. What can be cut to meet this need?*

Assessment:

1. See Group Member Evaluation (For Individual participation)
2. Independence Square Activity Group Evaluation

4 Points	On or under budget	Transportation, Food, Cooking Utensils, Tools all represented
3 Points	Less than \$25 over	Includes three of the above
2 Points	Less than \$50 over	Includes two of the above
1 Point	More than \$50 over budget	Includes only one of the above

8 Points Possible → \_\_\_\_\_ x's 5 for final score. \_\_\_\_\_ / 40

Extension: *After discussing the last trip west (Independence Square Activity) and positive and negative economic choices, form new teams and distribute the trip planning sheet again after raising prices. Explain that after five years, prices for goods have risen dramatically due to the increased demand. Challenge the new*

*teams to make the journey with only an additional \$100.*

References: Independence Square Activity found in \_\_\_\_\_

Graphics: See PowerPoint

*“A People without history are like the wind on the buffalo grass...”*  
Lakota

## Independence Square Activity Group Member Evaluation

Directions: Cut apart the boxes below to grade each member of your group. Fill in the information and rate your friends on the following scale:

- ☺ This person did their job and contributed ideas
- ☹ This person did their job or gave ideas but not both
- ☹ This person didn't do anything

<p>Your Name:</p> <p>Your Group Role:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 30%;">Group Members</th> <th style="width: 70%;">Rating</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☺ ☹ ☹</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☺ ☹ ☹</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☺ ☹ ☹</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Group Members	Rating	1.	☺ ☹ ☹	2.	☺ ☹ ☹	3.	☺ ☹ ☹	<p>Your Name:</p> <p>Your Group Role:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 30%;">Group Members</th> <th style="width: 70%;">Rating</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☺ ☹ ☹</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☺ ☹ ☹</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☺ ☹ ☹</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Group Members	Rating	1.	☺ ☹ ☹	2.	☺ ☹ ☹	3.	☺ ☹ ☹
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## Independence Square Activity

Below is a suggested supply list for a wagon trip to Oregon. This list, typical of many such lists, recommended that over half of the 2500-pound (1125-kg) load be made of food. The prices listed varied greatly, and inflation was an economic problem then too. Only one year after this list was made, prices went up 50 percent, bringing the total close to \$900.

Let's pretend you're a pioneer traveling to Oregon with a spouse and two children. You've had a hard year and don't have the \$570.85 that the following recommended supplies would cost. On another paper, list what you would choose to take if you had only \$400 to spend. You might have to research what some of these items are. After you make your list, write a paragraph explaining why you chose (and did not choose) the items you did. Be sure your supplies total no more than \$400.

### Suggested Supplies for Crossing the Oregon Trail

3 yoke of oxen, \$75 per yoke	\$225.00	1 skillet	\$1.50
1 wagon and cover	100.00	2 water buckets	.50
1 tent	15.00	2 small tin pails	1.00
12 sacks of flour	36.00	75 feet (23 m) of rope	2.50
400 pounds (180 kg) of bacon	40.00	6 tablespoons	.50
100 pounds (45 kg) of coffee	30.00	2 camp kettles	1.25
40 pounds (18 kg) of candles	10.00	4 gold pans	3.00
10 pounds (4.5 kg) of tea	10.00	4 picks	5.00
Yeast powders	5.00	4 shovels	5.00
50 pounds (22.5 kg) of salt	1.00	2 axes	2.50
3 pounds (1.35 kg) of pepper	.50	2 bread pans	1.00
2 bushels (70 liters) of beans	3.00	1 wagon bucket	1.00
15 gallons (57 liters) of vinegar	4.00	1 each, handsaw and drawing knife	2.00
25 pounds (11 kg) of bar soap	3.00	1 pair of gold scales	4.00
50 pounds (23 kg) of lard	5.00	2 chisels and augers	2.00
1 gross matches	1.00	2 files	.50
1 ten-gallon (38-liter) water keg	1.25	1 each, hatchet and hammer	1.00
1 coffee mill	.75	2 gimlets	.25
2 coffee pots	1.50	10 pounds (5 kg) of cut and wrought nails	.75
8 tin plates	.50	1 whetstone	.10
8 tin cups	.50	4 bushels (141 liters) dried apples	6.00
2 frying pans	1.00	1 bushel (35 liters) dried peaches	2.00
4 butcher knives	2.00	50 pounds (23 kg) of rice	5.00
6 knives and 6 forks	1.50	200 pounds (90 kg) of sugar	25.00

