The Importance of Trails: Finding meaning in the Oregon Trail
By Amanda Mattei
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Overview
This lesson will give students reasons why trails were used in the past, and why there are still trails in use today. When studying The Oregon Trail, students often lose sight of the reason behind why the trail originally began. In order to keep in mind the importance of this movement, this lesson will give students a way to understand the importance of human connectivity on the trail through physical activity and the comparison of The Oregon Trail with El Camino De Santiago in the Iberian Peninsula.

This lesson should be placed during a unit on The Oregon Trail, not as a precursor to one. This will inform students of the importance of trails in the past and present, and to thoroughly understand it they should have prior knowledge on The Oregon Trail. Students need a basic understanding of the Oregon Trail to accomplish the objectives in this lesson. In completing this lesson, students will see the importance of trail systems not just in Oregon, but in Europe as well. Students will see why trails are used, how trails connect humans and everything that comes with human interaction, and this lesson will enrich any teaching unit on The Oregon Trail.

This lesson also utilizes many collaborative learning strategies that keep the students engaged in the topics and content given to them. By using these strategies with this topic, students gain a deeper understanding of The Oregon Trail and El Camino De Santiago while increasing their relationship and conversational skills with their peers.

National Geography Standards
Human Systems
(9) The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth’s Surface.

Oregon Geography Content Standards
(6) Analyze economic, social, human migration, settlement, and distribution patterns.

Connections to Common Core
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4.1
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.4.2
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.2**
Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

**Objectives**
In completing this exercise, students should be able to:
- understand the importance of trail systems in connecting humans together.
- compare and contrast The Oregon Trail with El Camino De Santiago.
- list two reasons why trails were used.

**Grade Level:** 4  **Time:** About 1 hour

**Materials:**
- 10-15 cones or stationary objects to mark a path
- Anything that could be used as obstacles in a path
- Chart paper to create an anchor chart
- Markers (enough for each student and to create the anchor chart)
- 1 piece of copy paper per student
- Source B and E available for students to use either on paper or digitally
- Articles about The Oregon Trail and El Camino De Santiago printed
  - enough of each for half of the class, they will be marking these.
- Student Vocabulary Glossary available to students either on paper or digitally
- 1 sticky note per student

**Background:**
Students need a basic understanding of the areas that The Oregon Trail covered. They should know the general location of where it started and ended, and what drove the settlers to move west to begin with. Both Source B and C will give students information on The Oregon Trail, so students will have resources if they don’t remember all of the details.

In order to get the most out of this lesson, students must have the ability to converse in collaborative conversations and know and use guidelines for class/partner discussions. This lesson is a great way for students to partake in collaborative learning, and can be used to aid in the development of this skill. Keeping the students engaged is essential to creating a fun, informative learning environment for this lesson.

**Procedures:**

*Before Beginning:*
1. Prepare the trail you wish to make before beginning the lesson.
2. Pass out the copy paper and markers to each student.
3. Have chart paper prepared to write on.
4. Print out (or have digital access to) the articles and maps for students to read in step 6.

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| 1. Post the question, “Why are trails important?” for all the students to see.  
  - Have students work independently to brainstorm written responses using their markers on one corner of the white copy paper in front of them. | 2 minutes |
| 2. Partner talk: Have the students partner up and share responses they just wrote. | About 1 minute |
| 3. Have each pair share out one response and write it on half of the chart paper, keep the rest of the space for the end. | About 2 minutes |
| 4. Tell the students that they travel a dangerous trail of their own that will get them from one location (an end of a field or gym) to the desired location (the other side of a field or gym). Their town has run out of water so they must get to the next town over to get water to survive.  
  - Make sure to read the rules aloud to the students before beginning:  
  - **Rules for the Trail Game:**  
    - Students will be in teams of 4-5  
    - Students must link arms or hold hands the entire time. If their arms unlink, they ‘die’ on the trail and don’t get to the water.  
    - They must crawl on any and all grass they come across.  
    - If any obstacles arise (the balls or objects that are placed) every team member must go over them. They may not go around them and they cannot lift them up.  
    - The team has 2 minutes to complete their travel, and will have 3 minutes to discuss strategy before beginning.  
    - All the teams will go at the same time to simulate all of the pilgrims leaving their homes at the same time to travel. | 10 minutes |
| 5. Debrief: Have students write on their copy paper two things that they learned from trying to complete the trail with their team. Wait until the end of the lesson to discuss students’ responses. | 3-5 minutes |
| 6. Introduce El Camino De Santiago and review The Oregon Trail. | 10-15 minutes
*Have all articles and*
- Go over student vocabulary glossary (Source A) before having them read the articles.
- Have students read the articles about the Camino and The Oregon Trail in partners (each partner reads one of the articles and uses the strategy below, then when they finish they switch articles and repeat the process). Using their markers, the students will do the following on the articles:
  - UNDERLINE sentences or phrases the article uses to tell why people traveled on the trail.
  - CIRCLE any struggles that occurred on the trails.
  - STAR any time humans connected with each other.
  - Put a QUESTION mark by anything they don’t understand.
  - Make sure to post this on the board (Source F) for students to be able to refer back to.
- Together, the students will compare what they marked and come up with two reasons why either of the trails were used.
  - Have students write the reasons on their original copy papers.

7. Have the pairs of students partner up with another pair and compare the two reasons they came up with as to why trails were used.

8. Class Discussion
   - Bring all the students together with their copy papers.
   - Go over El Camino De Santiago, The Oregon Trail, and the trail game with the students. Use these discussion questions to guide:
     - How did any of the trails connect humans?
     - Did the trails connect more than humans?
     - Why did either begin or end?
     - What struggles occurred during either of the trails?
     - How were you successful in traveling your own trail?
       - What was difficult, what was easy?
     - What trails do we use today in our area? Why are they important?

9. Ask the same question from step 1: “Why are trails important?”
   - Record reasons why trails are important on the anchor chart that was started in step 3 from student responses.
9. Pass out a sticky note for each student. Have them write down two reasons why trails are important.

Assessment:

Formative: The information taken from the initial question, “Why are trails important?” will give information as to how much students know before beginning the lesson. Use this data to inform teaching during the lesson.

Summative: At the end of the lesson, students will complete an exit ticket on a sticky note that asks for two responses to the question: “Why are trails important?” The responses from students will inform you of whether or not the students were able to understand the lesson, and if reteaching may need to occur.

Extensions and/or Adaptations:

- For students that have any physical disabilities, the initial activity will need to be adapted to meet their needs. A great alternative would be to create a “Trail” on paper that can be traveled along with game pieces or pencil marks.
- To extend this lesson, look at even more trails from around the world. Bringing in information about the Silk Road for another comparison would allow students to see more examples worldwide. This extension would need further explanation of trade routes and varying navigational tools used to follow this trail.
- To adapt this lesson to make it shorter or extend it over a longer period of time, the initial physical activity could be completed one day, and the reading of the articles and class discussion could occur on a separate day. This could give more time for discussion if needed.

Sources

A. Student Vocabulary Glossary:

1. **Trail**: a mark or series of signs or objects left behind by the passage of someone or something; a beaten path through rough country such as a forest or mountain.

2. **Pilgrim**: a traveler on a journey to a holy or special place.

3. **Pilgrimage**: a journey a pilgrim takes

4. **Intertwined**: to twist or twine together

5. **Hospice/Hostel**: a place for travelers to stay

6. **Emigrant**: someone who leaves their own country in order to settle permanently in another

7. **Feasible**: possible to do easily or conveniently

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B. Map of the Oregon Trail:

The Oregon Trail

![Map of the Oregon Trail](image-url)
C. Oregon Trail History:

The Oregon Trail
By Todd Underwood

The Oregon Trail migration, more correctly known as the Oregon-California Trail migration, is one of the most important events in American History. The Oregon-California trail was a 2,170 mile route from Missouri to Oregon and California that enabled the migrating of the early pioneers to the western United States. The first mass migration did not occur until 1843 when approximately 1000 pioneers made the journey at one time.

This trail was the only feasible land route for settlers to get to the West Coast. From 1843 until 1869 when the first transcontinental railroad was completed, there were over 500,000 people who made the trip in covered wagons pulled by mule and oxen. Some went all the way to Oregon to farm and others went to California to search for gold. The trip usually took 4-6 months by wagon traveling 15 miles a day whereas the only other route to the west, by sea, took a full year.

In the early Spring, emigrant campers would infiltrate Independence, Missouri and set up camp, waiting for the grass to grow along the Oregon Trail. While waiting, the emigrants would stock up on supplies, try to locate friends, and make other preparations for their journey. If they left too early, there would be no grass for their animals to eat which could be a fatal mistake. If they left too late, they would get caught by the winter snows.

Most settlers traveled in farm wagons, four feet by ten feet, with a thousand pounds of food. These wagons had cotton covers treated with linseed oil to keep the rain out. Many were equipped with tool boxes, water containers, and spare axles as breaking an axle without a spare meant abandoning the wagon.

When the time finally came to leave, the settlers would all try to leave at once creating a massive traffic jam further hindered by the inexperience of some of the green east coast teams. As their traveling progressed, most realized they had over packed and were forced to lighten their loads by throwing things overboard. Because of the heavy loads, many were forced to walk the 2,170 mile journey instead of ride in the wagon.

There were many accidents along the way including being run over by the wagons which meant certain death. Another problem for the travelers was Cholera. Some wagon trains lost two-thirds of their people to this quick killing disease. Another major danger to the settlers was weather. Traveling in the summer meant dealing with thunderstorms, lightning and hail. Many were killed by lightning or hail the size of baseballs. All in all, one in ten did not survive the journey.

Winter snows would close the mountain passes and travel was a race with time. In the early years, before the Barlow road was opened, travelers would have to abandon their wagons for boats and float down the Columbia river. Many lost their lives in the rapids and rough parts just miles from their destination. After 1846, and upon paying a toll, the pioneers could finish their journey by crossing the Cascades on the Barlow road.
Once in Oregon and California, settlers would start a new life and build farms or set off to the gold mines. Whether crossing the county in this way was worth the trouble or not, only the early pioneers would know. Today, in many places, the wagons ruts can still be seen. The Oregon National Historic Trail was designated by Congress in 1978 and is administered by the National Park Service in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, state and local governments and many private individuals whose property the trail crosses. Today, one can drive a similar route from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City, Oregon and visit 125 historic sites and see over 300 miles of existing wagon ruts.

This article was taken from the following website and modified to fit the time of this lesson. The website can also be used for students to explore:

D. El Camino De Santiago History/Article:

El Camino de Santiago de Compostela is a network of routes across Spain and Europe which all lead to Santiago de Compostela, in the northwest of Spain. In the Middle Ages, these routes were walked as a pilgrimage to the tomb of the apostle St. James. Nowadays, tens of thousands walk or bike the Camino de Santiago every year in an epic journey of 500 miles. People from all over the world with all kinds of motivations: sport, culture, religion, nature, adventure etc., travel El Camino de Santiago, or parts of it, in a lifetime experience.

Spilling over the Pyrenees from France into Spain, the network of trails that make up the Route of St. James—or El Camino de Santiago—converges at the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. For more than a thousand years, pilgrims have trekked over the high plains of Castilla and the hills of Galicia, some to honor the Apostle James; others in the midst of their own spiritual journey. The route has given rise to historic and religious sites that represent centuries of European architecture at its best. Set out from Pamplona to discover the longest pilgrimage route in Europe, experiencing the most picturesque and poignant sections of this UNESCO World Heritage site on foot.

Some aspects of the modern Camino are fundamentally the same as they were for the medieval pilgrims: as a practical affair, the Camino is a long walk. While underway, the pilgrims need support for food, lodging and direction. As was mentioned above, an infrastructure of hospices arose in the Middle Ages and it still exists - and in fact, it is growing rapidly. There are still a few pilgrim facilities run by religious places, but much more common today are albergues or refugios. Some provide breakfast and/or dinner, some have cooking facilities available while some do not, some have a set price while some are donation, some are operated by municipalities or associations while some are private businesses. Aside from the few albergues that provide meals, meals can be found basically in the same sort of places that a tourist would use - restaurants and the like.

This article was pieced together from the following three websites. Students can also browse the websites if you have time during the lesson and/or access to technology:
- http://www.americanpilgrims.org/history
- http://www.caminosantiagodecompostela.com/
E. Maps of El Camino De Santiago (Past and Present):

Current routes in use:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camino_de_Santiago

El Camino de Santiago from the past in the Iberian Peninsula:
For reference, here are two maps of the Iberian Peninsula so students can see where it is in relation to the rest of the world:
F. Partner Reading Guidelines

- **Underline** sentences or phrases that tell why people traveled on the trail.

- **Circle** any struggles that occurred on the trail.

- **Star** any time humans connected with each other.

- Put a ? **Question Mark** by anything you don’t understand.