



## Where Was The Oregon Trail?

### Introduction

This lesson is designed for 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. It provides students with an opportunity to learn about important landmarks along the Oregon Trail. Students use a grid map to plot landmarks along the route and complete a quick writing activity expressing their opinion about which landmark was most important to the pioneers and why. This lesson includes math, reading, writing and social studies.

### Vocabulary

Oregon Trail: a historic overland route across the Western United States used by travelers in the mid-1800s.

Pioneer: a person who is among the first to explore or settle an area.

### Materials

This lesson includes:

- Oregon Trail Grid Map
- Landmarks of the Oregon Trail
- Quick Writing Activity

You will need:

- A pen
- A highlighter

Extension activities:

- Native American Tribes Word Search
- Oregon Trail Word Match

### Background Information

Many pioneers traveled the Oregon Trail when they decided to move across the United States. Traveling more than 2,000 miles on the Oregon Trail was a very difficult journey that took 4 to 6 months. The Oregon Trail was not like most of our modern roads and highways. The dirt path was very dusty. When it rained, the trail turned into mud. Along the way, there were no street signs to show which direction to go, no restaurants to eat at, and no hotels to sleep in. There were a few important landmarks though to help the pioneers find their way and stay on-track.

### Using the Grid Map and Landmarks List

Take a look at the Oregon Trail Grid Map. The thick black line on the map shows the general route of the Oregon Trail. Along the bottom of the grid are letter of the alphabet. They represent the X axis of the grid. Along the left side of the grid are numbers. They represent the Y axis of the grid.

Next, look at Landmarks of Oregon Trail. This tells us about some of the important places along the journey and where to find them on the grid map.

Let's practice by finding the coordinates for Independence, Missouri on the Oregon Trail Grid Map.

- The coordinates for Independence, Missouri landmark are X,5.



- Can you use your fingers to find this point on the grid map? First, find the letter X along the bottom of the grid with your right hand and place your finger on that line (the X-line goes up and down). Next, find the number 5 along the left side of the grid with your left hand and place your finger on that line (the 5-line goes from side to side). Now follow the X-line and the 5-line with your fingers until they meet. The place where they cross is coordinate X,5. Did you find it?
- Use a pen to mark the spot on the Oregon Trail closest to X,5 and label it with the title "Independence."

Now that you've found out where Independence, Missouri is located, your next task is to find out why this landmark was important to the pioneers. Read the description about this landmark. Use a highlighter pen to identify key words or phrases about why this place would be important if you were traveling along the Oregon Trail. Think about why a pioneer would want to stop at this landmark.

Continue adding the remaining landmarks to the grid map and use your highlighter to identify the importance of each landmark.

- Did you mark and label the location of all 14 landmarks on your grid map?
- If you are a pioneer traveling the Oregon Trail, which landmark do you think is the most important along your journey and why?

### **Using the Quick Writing Activity**

Use the information that you highlighted on the landmarks list to decide which place was most important for the pioneers. Then, use the Quick Writing Activity graphic organizer to help you write an opinion paragraph about this landmark.

In the center square of the Quick Writing Activity graphic organizer, write a sentence with your opinion about the most important landmark along the Oregon Trail.

- For example, you could write a sentence like "I think that Chimney Rock was the most important landmark on the Oregon Trail."

Use the information that you highlighted on the landmarks list to help support your opinion. In the surrounding boxes of the graphic organizer provide 3 reasons for your opinion about the most important landmark and a concluding sentence.

- For example, you could write a sentence like "Chimney Rock signaled to travelers that they had completed one-third of the trail."

Next, use the information in your graphic organizer to create a 5-sentence paragraph describing the most important landmark along the Oregon Trail.

Finally, you can use the Opinion Writing Self-Evaluation Tool to check your work.

For bonus activities, complete the Native American Tribes Word Search and Oregon Trail Word Match.



**Want to Learn More:**

Compare your Oregon Trail grid map to this map from the National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center, <https://www.blm.gov/or/oregontrail/files/OregonTrailMap5a.pdf>

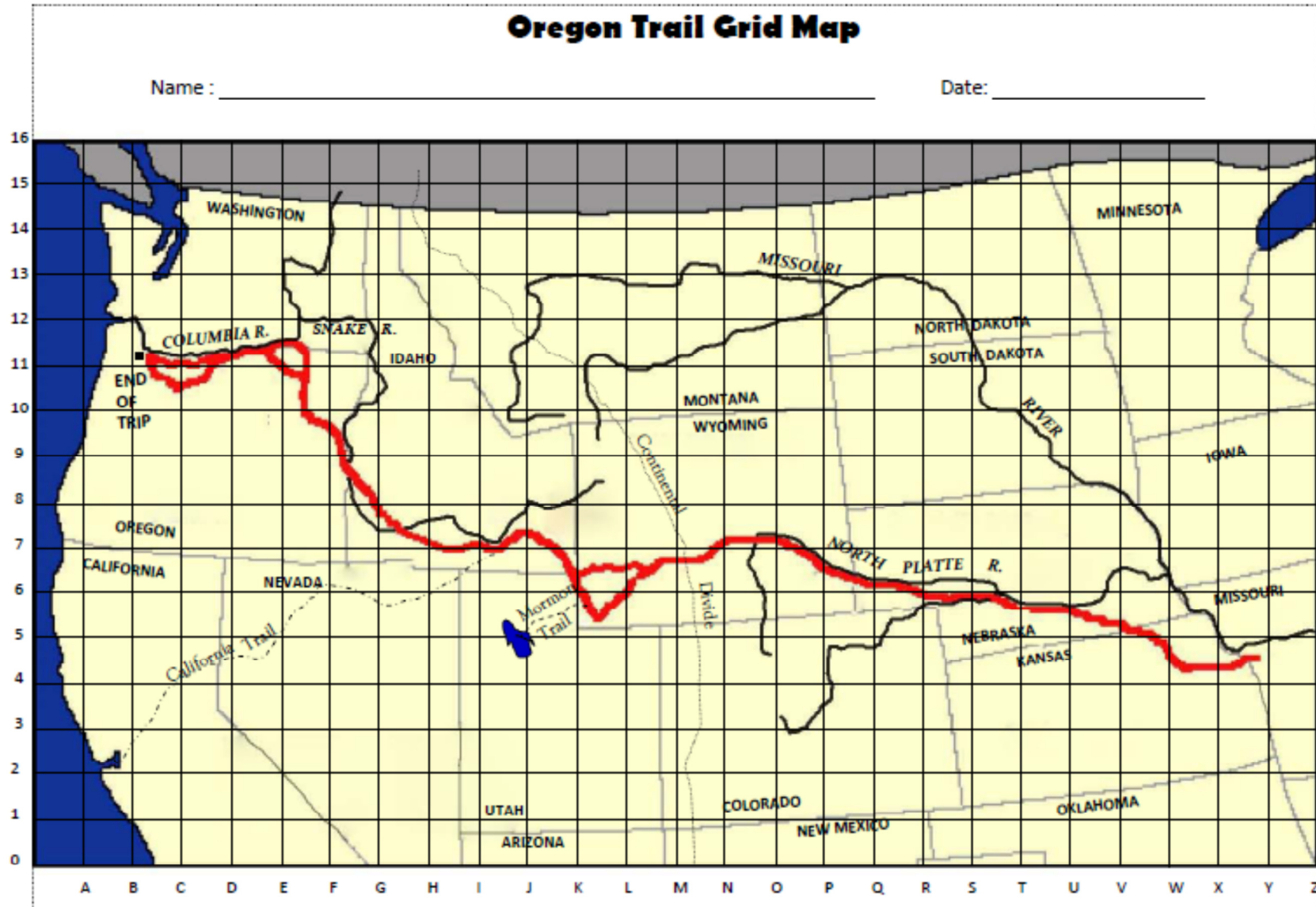
Get an overview of the Oregon Trail with this video from the Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/video/169076/overview-Oregon-Trail>

Find out more about Native American Tribes who lived in areas near the Oregon Trail, <http://www.native-languages.org/kids.htm>

Try a pioneer recipe. You can find recipes for making hard tack dough and homemade butter on the Job Carr Cabin Museum's Learn at Home webpage: <https://www.jobcarmuseum.org/learn-at-home>

Plan your visit to the Oregon Trail with this interactive map from the National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/oreg/planyourvisit/places-to-go.htm>

See what the Oregon Trail looks like today with this aerial view from the Smithsonian, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/category/smithsonian-channel/what-the-oregon-trail-looks-like-today-from-above/>





## **Landmarks of the Oregon Trail**

### **Independence, Missouri (X,5)**

Independence, Missouri was the most popular starting point for pioneers to begin their journey on the Oregon Trail. It was known as Mile 0. Independence was an important trading post for pioneers to stock their wagons with supplies. Pioneers would often try to organize with other travelers so they could go west together in a group or wagon train.

- Job Carr began his journey at another starting location for the Oregon Trail – Council Bluffs, Iowa (V,7).

### **Fort Kearny (T,6)**

The U.S. Army established the fort in 1848 to provide protection for travelers. All trails from jumping off points along the Missouri River met here, at the “Gateway to the Great Plains.” Many pioneers purchased food here and sent their first letters about the journey to their friends and family back home. Travelers often encountered the friendly Pawnee and Cheyenne tribes in this area, trading extra clothes, tobacco, rifles and other supplies for Native American horses or food.

### **Chimney Rock (P,7)**

Chimney Rock is an impressive rock formation nearly 300 feet high, that looks like a chimney against the sky. It signaled to travelers that they had completed one-third of the trail. Many travelers liked to carve their name on the rock.

### **Fort Laramie (N,7)**

This early trading post of the fur trappers, Cheyenne, Sioux (Dakota) and Arapaho tribes became a major stopping point for travelers. It was a good resting place after the pioneers had traveled about six weeks since seeing another settlement. Fort Laramie is located where the Laramie River and the North Platte River join, offering large grazing areas for oxen, horses and other animals. Many pioneers stopped here to wash their laundry in the river and to sell any extra food, furniture and supplies that were making the wagons too heavy and slow.

### **Independence Rock (M,8)**

Fur trappers named this granite formation on July 4, 1824. If the pioneers could get to Independence Rock by July 4, they knew they were on schedule to cross the mountains before winter snows started. Many travelers left messages or carved their names on the 130-foot-high rock.

### **South Pass (M,7)**

Travelers crossed the Continental Divide and passed into the Oregon Country. The pass is so wide and level that many travelers did not realize they were in the Pacific watershed until they were well on the other side. South Pass marked the halfway point of the trail.



### **Pacific Springs (L,7)**

Many wagon trains stopped here to camp and refresh. This was the first water source after many days traveling on the trail. The next good water was another 40 miles away through a very dry and rocky portion of the trail.

### **Fort Bridger (K,5)**

A mountain man named Jim Bridger began this fort as a trading post with the Shoshone (Snake) tribe and fur trappers in 1842. Its blacksmith shop became a vital resupply point for wagon trains. This was one of the few places in the area with trees and fresh water. In the 1850s, pioneers discovered several short-cuts that could cut several days off the journey, so it is unlikely that Job Carr stopped at Fort Bridger on his journey in 1864.

### **Soda Springs (K,6)**

Soda Springs are natural bubbling pools of carbonated water, caused by ancient volcanic activity, that the Shoshone believe are healing waters. Some springs have naturally hot water so many travelers enjoyed a relaxing bath. Other springs had cold water or geysers. The minerals in some of the pools could make the pioneers ill if they drank too much.

### **Fort Hall (J,7)**

Fort Hall was the most important trading post in the Snake River Valley. This was the last chance for travelers to restock supplies for the rest of their journey. It became the key post for overland stage, mail and freight lines to towns. Travelers may have traded goods here with the Shoshone and Bannock Tribes.

### **Three Island Crossing (H,7)**

Travelers had to decide whether to stay on the dry, sandy and dusty south side of the Snake River or attempt a dangerous water crossing to reach the more favorable north side of the river.

### **Whitman Mission (E,12)**

Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were part of the first wagon train along the Oregon Trail in 1836. After 1845, most wagon trains took a shortcut that skipped the Whitman Mission. Pioneers only stopped at the Mission if they were sick or needed supplies. In 1847, a measles epidemic took the lives of many Native American children in the area. The local Cayuse Tribe blamed the Whitman family and white settlers for causing the disease. In response, they killed the Whitman family and burned down the mission.



### **The Dalles (D,11)**

The Dalles was home to the Wasco and Wishram people for over 10,000 years and served as a center of trade between many tribes. In 1855, the Wasco tribe was forced to move south to the Warm Springs Indian Reservation while the Wishram tribe was moved to the Yakama Reservation. The tribes maintained access to The Dalles area for seasonal salmon fishing along the Columbia River but were no longer allowed to live there.

At The Dalles, pioneers had to make a choice about whether to continue traveling by land or by water.

- If the pioneers chose the water route, they would have to build or rent a wood raft to take their wagon and all of their supplies down the Columbia River. Renting a boat from the Hudson Bay Company was about \$80. Floating down a river might sound relaxing, but there were dangerous rapids and waterfalls along the 83-mile route.
- After 1846, the pioneers could pay a toll to use the rugged 110-mile Barlow Road through thick forests, over steep hills and around Mount Hood. The rate was \$5 per wagon plus 10 cents per animal.
- After 1852, travelers like Job Carr could use a much faster and less dangerous combination of steamboats and trains to get from the Dalles to Oregon City or Portland.

### **Oregon City (B,11)**

You've made it! Oregon City is the official end of the Oregon Trail, where the Willamette River meets the Columbia River. Many pioneers stayed in Oregon City or nearby Portland, but others continued their journey to find unclaimed land, look for jobs, and meet up with friends or family who had already moved west.

Job Carr continued walking north to reach Puget Sound and look for the place where he thought the transcontinental railroad would be built.



**Quick Writing Activity**  
**Landmarks of the Oregon Trail**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Review your highlighted notes from the list of Oregon Trail landmarks.

If you are a pioneer traveling the Oregon Trail, which landmark do you think is the most important along your journey and why?

Reason 1	Reason 2
<b>My Opinion</b>	
Reason 3	Conclusion

Write a paragraph using the information from your 4-square graphic organizer:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---





Quick Writing Activity – Landmarks on the Trail  
Opinion Writing Self-Evaluation Tool

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	Student Self-Evaluation Score	*Optional Teacher / Parent Score
I neatly wrote my name on my paper.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I clearly stated my opinion.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I provided reasons for my opinion supported by facts and details.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I linked my opinion and reasons using words and phrases (such as, for instance, in order to, in addition).	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I provided a concluding statement about my opinion.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I used complete sentences.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I spelled all words correctly.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I used punctuation and capitalization appropriately.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
I used grammar correctly.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
<b><u>TOTAL SCORE</u></b>	—	—
<b>POSSIBLE SCORE</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>36</b>

1 = It's a start.  
2 – Pretty good.  
3 = Thumbs up. You're so close.  
4 = Fabulous. You got it!

# Job Carr Cabin Museum

## Native American Tribes Word Search

The pioneers encountered many Native American tribes along the Oregon Trail.  
Can you find the names of the tribes Job Carr might have met on his journey west to Puget Sound?

### Native American Tribes



PAWNEE  
ARIKARA  
CHEYENNE  
COMANCHE  
SIOUX  
ARAPAHO  
OTO  
KANSA  
BANNOCK  
SHOSHONE  
PAIUTE  
NEZPERCE  
CAYUSE  
UMATILLA  
WALLAWALLA  
WASCO  
NISQUALLY  
PUYALLUP

# Job Carr Cabin Museum

## Oregon Trail Word Match

### The Oregon Trail

In the mid-1800s, thousands of people travelled across the United States on the Oregon Trail. They used covered wagons pulled by oxen or horses to transport their goods and supplies. Traveling more than 2,000 miles on the Oregon Trail was a very difficult journey that took 4 to 6 months.

The Oregon Trail was not like modern roads or highways. The dirt trail was very dusty. When it rained, the dirt became mud. Along the way, there were no street signs to show which way to go, no restaurants to eat at, and no hotels to sleep in.

Job Carr crossed the Oregon Trail in 1864.

*Can you find the Oregon Trail words that go together?*

Covered	Divide
Butter	Cabin
Puget	Horn
Independence	Sound
Powder	Chip
Buffalo	Post
Corn	Trail
Oregon	Wagon
Continental	Shoe
Soda	Wheel
Log	Churn
Trading	Springs
Horse	Meal
Spinning	Rock

*Answers: Covered Wagon, Butter Churn, Puget Sound, Independence Rock, Powder Horn, Buffalo Chip, Corn Meal, Oregon Trail, Continental Divide, Soda Springs, Log Cabin, Trading Post, Horse Shoe, Spinning Wheel*