

## **Exploring U.S. westward expansion in the elementary and middle school curriculum through tall tales**

Gina M. Almerico  
The University of Tampa

Nicole Martin  
The University of Tampa

William Masuck  
The University of Tampa

Cynthia Strickland.  
The University of Tampa

Jessica Thomas  
The University of Tampa

### **Abstract**

Teaching social studies in the elementary and middle school curriculum is enhanced by incorporating quality children's and adolescent literature and strategies that bring the human element into play. American tall tales are a genre unique to the history of our nation and provide a glimpse into the way early settlers of the west envisioned heroism and adventure. Often textbooks written to teach social studies concepts are written in an expository style replete with facts and numbers for student to decipher and memorize. By expanding the study of the west to include tall tales teachers can ignite the flame of curiosity and exploration in the minds of their students.

Keywords: Westward expansion, tall tales, elementary social studies, teaching with children's literature

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is the result, in part, of an assignment completed by teacher candidates in a graduate level content area reading class. Candidates were tasked with developing a one (1) hour fully simulated class presentation dealing with the effective use of reading in the content area in 6 – 12 instruction. In groups of 3 – 4, candidates researched effective reading in the content area strategies to develop lessons to share with peers which incorporated the use of quality literature to teach social studies concepts. In planning this presentation, group members were asked to fill one hour with instructional activities.

Although there is near-universal agreement that geography is an essential component of the elementary and middle school curriculum, geography has struggled to find a significant place in the schools. In most K-6 classrooms, geographic teaching and learning are a small part of social studies – usually an activity limited to memorizing the names and locations of a few geographic features, such as, oceans, rivers, lakes, states and capitals.

Gregg and Leinhardt (1994) defined geography this way: Geography uses the language of maps to communicate ideas about context and distribution of phenomena and processes important for human decision making, issues of scale, the dynamic nature of phenomena, and cultural perspective.

This definition is rather complex, however it provides the basis for understanding the geographic component of the social studies. Geography requires that students know how to read and make several types of maps. So we can think of geography is a type of literacy – the ability to read and write maps, not words per se.

Through geography lessons, students should learn how people, resources, and products are distributed over the earth. Geography study should provide a context for understanding events as students see how the decisions people make are influenced by their physical surroundings. Students should learn how people interact with the environment, and as a result, how both people and place change.

Geography presents a unique challenge to teachers because geographic information is presented in an unfamiliar format. Maps and globes require a different type of reading from expository or narrative texts and students will end up working with a variety of maps, each with its own category of information. For example one type of map could show the climate zones of the U.S. , while another could show the time zones of the U.S., where yet another might show the ten largest cities in the U.S..

Map reading skills should be developed through repeated practice and direct instruction. As with all instruction, teaching should move from concrete to abstract, from simple to complex.

### **Integrating Literature into the Social Studies**

The following mini unit was developed to demonstrate how the study of geography at the elementary school level could be integrated into the study of children's and adolescent literature. Quality children's and adolescent literature has the potential to make personal connections with the reader. Good stories provide genuine opportunities for readers to see themselves in the characters they meet. Good books elicit unique emotions and responses which allows children to transport themselves to a whole new world (Columba, Kim, & Moe, 2009). Social studies concepts, such as geography, can be learned through interaction between what students already know and what they learn by reading, listening, and discussing carefully selected books. In

history and social studies, teachers who have reported using trade books and analyzing the data collected from student work, make a strong argument for the amount of learning that can occur (Kane, 2008). D'Costa (2002) found when students were given the opportunity to read literature related to social studies topics on their own, they eagerly chose a variety of subjects, including Westward expansion.

Social studies is a content area that integrates naturally with children's literature. Historical fiction, for example, can take dry, historical facts and breathe life into the people and events of the past. Historical events from the past, lives of famous and not so famous people and sociological patterns from generation to generation can be found in story form. The study of geography, a strand of the social studies can be embellished through the use of literature as well. Literature written for children, whether it is historical fact or fiction, or information texts addressing the study of landforms and places, can serve as a natural vessel for capturing the interests and attention of young readers (Columba, Kim, & Moe, 2009).

## **Tall Tales/Westward Expansion Mini Unit - Lesson Plans**

### **Lesson One - Geography of the West**

Grade Level/English Proficiency Level for ESOL Learners: Fifth Grade/ESOL at the Proficient Level

Nature of Activity/Goal of Lesson: The topic of the lesson includes identifying the major geographic features of the American West.

Objectives:

1. The students will identify and locate the major geographic features on a physical map of the West (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).
2. Given a U.S.A. shaped sugar cookie, colored frosting, and chocolate chips, the students will accurately create an edible map depicting the major geographic features of the West (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).

Materials:

Bean, T.W., Readence, J.E., & Baldwin, R.S. (2008). *Content area literacy: An integrated approach, (9th ed.)*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt

Johnson, S. (2004). *Daily geography practice grade 4*. Monterey, CA: Evan Moore Overhead physical map of the USA

Lauber, P. (1986). *Volcano: The eruption and healing of Mount St. Helens*. New York: Aladdin Paper

McCoy, I. & Graham, L. (2005). *Hands-on geography*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company Edible Map, page 47

Rocky Mountains DVD

Cereal bowl

United States Map Transparencies

Markers/colored pencils/crayons

USA Shaped cookies (one for each student)

Vanilla frosting (mixed with food coloring to make blue, yellow, and green frosting) tubes of blue and green frosting, chocolate chips (for creating topographical maps of the USA using the USA Shaped cookie)

Plastic cutlery for each student  
Paper plate for each student  
Large Velcro map of the USA

Procedures:

1. Introduction - The teacher will begin by developing a structured semantic web to access students' prior knowledge of the West. He/she will write "The West" on the overhead projector. The following three categories of information will be solicited: 1) States (California, Colorado, Oregon, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico) 2) Geography (Rocky Mountains, plains, deserts, Pacific Ocean), 3) Climate (hot, cool, dry, wet).

2. Teacher Modeling - The teacher will share the following information as follows:

- A large Velcro map of the U.S.A. is placed on the whiteboard. As the teacher shares the background information, he/she places the names of the regions and states on the corresponding space on the map.
- Background: Of the five regions of the United States, the West (place The West over the region of the map) is the largest in area. Three of the five largest states are found there. The West can be divided into two parts – the Mountain and the Pacific states (label accordingly). Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and Idaho (as each state is named its label is placed on the map) are the Mountain states. California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii (as each state is named its label is placed on the map) are the Pacific states.
- The teacher will ask the students to imagine they are flying in an airplane above the western region of the United States. He/she will then distribute the physical map of the U.S.A. from Johnson page 63 (Attachment A). The overhead transparency of the physical map will be placed on the overhead projector. The teacher will explain the elements of the map:
  - Title – tells what the map represents
  - Legend (also called a map key) – is a list that explains the symbols on a map
  - Compass Rose – a symbol that shows direction on a map
  - Cardinal Directions – north, south east, and west (N, S, E, and W)
- The teacher will explain that a physical map shows the natural landforms and waterways of a place.
- To explore the West the trip will begin at the Great Plains. The teacher will ask students to place their finger at the starting point and will demonstrate this on the overhead projector. As the plane moves west, the Great Plains rise in elevation to 7,000 feet. Looking down from the airplane the student might see large wheat fields. He/she might also see sheep and cattle grazing on these flat lands.
- As the flight continues west, the airplane must climb higher in the air because it is nearing the great Rocky Mountains. The teacher will ask the students to place their finger on the Rocky Mountains (demonstrating this on the overhead projector). The Rocky Mountain ranges stretch from Alaska in the north to Mexico in the south. The Rockies are high, jagged mountains. Some of these mountains are so tall they stay covered in snow year-round. In Colorado more than 50 mountain peaks stand over 14,000 feet high. That is as tall as fourteen 100-story skyscrapers stacked on top of one another. The teacher will show the DVD of the Rocky Mountains here.
- The Continental Divide is the line dividing the rivers that flow east from the rivers that flow west. The Continental Divide is an imaginary line that runs north to south along the

top of the Rockies. The teacher will ask the students to place their finger on the Continental Divide (demonstrating this on the overhead projector). Most rivers that begin east of the Continental Divide flow east into the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean. Most rivers to the west of the Continental Divide flow west to the Pacific Ocean.

- The Great Basin is west of the Continental Divide. The teacher will ask the students to place their finger on the Great Basin (demonstrating this on the overhead projector). From the plane the students will see what appears to be a large wrinkled bowl. A basin is a low, bowl-shaped area (the teacher will show a cereal bowl as part of the explanation) that is completely surrounded by higher land. What appears from the airplane above to be wrinkles are actually mountain ranges. The Great Basin covers most of Nevada and parts of Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and California. The desert areas of the United States are found in the Great Basin.
- The Sierra Nevada mountain range lies west of the Great Basin and is found mostly in eastern California. The teacher will ask the students to place their finger on the Sierra Nevada Mountains (demonstrating this on the overhead projector). The mountains of the Sierra Nevada are very tall and, like the Rocky Mountains, are often snow-covered. The words, Sierra Nevada means “snowy mountains” in Spanish.
- The Cascade Range is another chain of mountains north of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The teacher will ask the students to place their finger on the Cascade Range (demonstrating this on the overhead projector). The Cascades stretch from Canada to northern California. This range of mountains is known for their volcanoes. A volcano is an opening in the earth that spews hot gas, ash, and lava. In 1980 Mount St. Helens in the state of Washington erupted and killed more than 60 people. Patricia Lauber wrote the book, *Volcano: The eruption and healing of Mount St. Helens*, in 1986. The teacher will show the book, which was awarded the Newberry Honor Award and share some of the photographs from the book with the students.
- Flying south of the Cascades you enter California’s Central Valley. The teacher will ask the students to place their finger on the Central Valley (demonstrating this on the overhead projector). This is where crops such as oranges, grapefruit, lettuce, and tomatoes are grown.
- West of the Central Valley is the Coast Ranges. The teacher will ask the students to place their finger on the Coast Ranges (demonstrating this on the overhead projector). These mountains run along the Pacific Coast from Alaska, through Canada, and into California. This is where the plane will land. We have crossed the western portion of the United States.

3. Guided Practice – The teacher will then direct the students to use colored pencils to color the western region of the U.S.A. on their copy of the physical map in the following manner:

- Great Plains – green
- Rocky Mountains – purple
- Continental Divide – red
- Great Basin – yellow
- Sierra Nevada – black
- Cascade Range – brown
- Central Valley – orange
- Coast Range – pink

As the teacher points to each geographical feature on the overhead physical map, he/she will hold up the corresponding colored pencil.

4. Independent Practice – The teacher will then lead the students through the creation of an edible map of the western region of the United States as follows:

- Each student will receive a sugar cookie shaped like the U.S.A., a paper plate and plastic cutlery.
- Using the physical map handout completed in Guided Practice for reference, the student will create land and water features of the West.
- Blue icing will be used for bodies of water, green icing for grasslands, and yellow icing for deserts. Chocolate chips will be used to represent the mountains.
- The students will create a legend (or key) for the edible map.
- Finally, the students will eat their cookie maps of the West.

Evaluation of Student Learning:

Objective One, the students will identify and locate the major geographic features on a physical map of the West, will be evaluated through teacher observation of their work by coloring the major features on the physical map.

Objective Two, given a U.S.A. shaped sugar cookie, colored frosting, and chocolate chips, the students will accurately create an edible map depicting the major geographic features of the West, will be evaluated by teacher observation of the cookie features and accompanying legend.

## **Lesson Two - Westward Expansion**

Grade Level/English Proficiency Level for ESOL Learners: Fifth Grade/ESOL at the Proficient Level

Nature of Activity/Goal of Lesson: The topic of the lesson includes westward expansion, wagon trains, and pioneers

Objectives:

1. Given the poem, Pioneers, the students will analyze the content to develop an accurate definition of the term, pioneer (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).
2. After hearing second-hand accounts of pioneer life, the students will discuss the hardships endured by the pioneers as they travel across the West (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).
3. Given a map of the U.S.A. and the westward trails, the student will cut and paste the map and assemble it to accurately show trails traveled by early pioneers (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).
4. Given a list of words from a passage about westward expansion, the student will write sentences to define the words based on context clues (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).
5. Given the handout of interactive maps showing two different routes to the West: the Oregon Trail and the Mormon Trail, the student will accurately construct each trail (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).

Materials:

- Bean, T.W., Readence, J.E., & Baldwin, R.S. (2008). *Content area literacy: An integrated approach, (9th ed.)*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt
- Levine, E. (1986). *If you traveled west in a covered wagon*. New York: Scholastic

Milliken, L. (1990). *Frontier American activity book*. Dana Point, CA: Edupress  
Silver, D. M. & Wynne, P. J. (2005). *Interactive 3-D maps: American history*. New York: Teaching Resources

Chart paper

Markers

Large Velcro map of the USA (labeled with major geographic features of the West from Lesson One)

Handout of USA map from Milliken, pages 4 & 5

Pioneer Poem Handout

Overhead images of pioneers

12" x 18" construction paper

Scissors

Glue sticks

Tape

#### Procedures:

1. Introduction - The teacher will begin by reviewing the major geographic features of the U.S.A. using the large Velcro map. The students will be asked to place the labeled names of the geographic features from the previous lesson (Great Plains, Rocky Mountains, Continental Divide, Great Basin, Sierra Nevada, Cascade Range, Central Valley, Coast Range) in the correct position on the map. The teacher will then ask the student to do a Quick Write to describe the types of landforms found in the West. The Quick Write strategy is an informal means of engaging students in thinking about a content topic and it works as follows: The students are given a writing prompt and asked to respond to that prompt by writing any ideas that come to mind. Spelling and grammar are not important – the idea is to get the students thoughts on paper as quickly as possible. Once students have written for about one minute, the teacher will ask volunteers to share their thoughts.

2. Teacher Modeling - The teacher will remind the students that in the previous lesson they took an imaginary trip across the West in an airplane. If they really flew in a plane from the eastern end of the Great Plains to the Pacific Coast it may take 3 to 4 hours to cover the distance. The teacher will tell the students that the lesson today will examine what it was like to travel across the West back in the 1840s in a covered wagon. The Teacher Modeling component of the lesson will proceed as follows:

- The teacher will distribute the handout of USA map from Milliken, pages 4 & 5 (Attachment B). This handout contains a map of the U.S.A. which clearly marks the trails used by early pioneers who crossed the West in covered wagons (California Trail, Old Spanish Trail, Oregon Trail, Santa Fe Trail), 12" x 18" construction paper, scissors, and glue sticks. The students will cut out the map and glue it to the construction paper.
- The teacher will engage the students in the Possible Sentences Strategy (Moore and Moore, 2007). Possible Sentences is a pre-reading activity that helps students use technical vocabulary and related concepts in the content area.

#### Steps for Possible Sentences

1. The teacher will list the following words on the overhead taken from the handout, The Covered Wagon (Attachment C):

- Prairie schooner
- Axel
- Toolbox

- Lariats
  - Buckskin
  - Wagon box
  - Jostling
  - Prized possessions
  - Abandoned
2. Each student will select two of the listed words or set of words and write a sentence using them. The teacher will ask for volunteers to dictate their sentences as he/she writes them on the board, whether the information is accurate or not.
3. After an arbitrary number of sentences have been generated and shared, the students will read the passage, *The Covered Wagon*, aloud as a class to verify the sentences on the board.
4. If necessary, the Possible Sentences are corrected using content clues from the passage.
- The teacher will then show students the three overhead transparencies of pioneers (Attachment D) The teacher will read the following sections from Levine:
    - Introduction
    - What was the Oregon Territory?
    - Why did some people want to travel all the way to Oregon? The teacher will share the following: Americans began moving westward before the American Revolution. In 1862, the passing of the Homestead Act spurred on this westward movement even more. This law gave 160 acres of land free to anyone who settled on it for five years and improved the land by building a house and planting crops. Life on the prairie was very difficult at times. The pioneers traded conveniences for new challenges when they went West.
    - What was a covered wagon?
  - The teacher will distribute the handout, *You Can't Take it With You* (Attachment E), from Milliken where students in small groups will decide which items depicted on the handout they would take on a trip to the West and which they would leave. Once students have completed this activity the teacher will read from Levine the section entitled, *What would your family bring in their covered wagon?*
  - Afterwards the teacher will ask the students to predict what types of hardships pioneers might encounter as they traveled over the major geographic features of the West. The teacher will list student responses on the overhead.
  - The following sections from Levine will be read aloud next: *How far would you travel in a day?* and *What were the dangers and difficulties of the trip?*
3. Guided Practice – The teacher will distribute the poem, *Pioneers* by Aileen Fisher and Olive Rabe (Attachment F). He/she will ask students to form pairs and each partner will take turns reading a stanza from the poem aloud to one another.

Pioneers  
Clothed in buckskin, clothed in homespun,  
Clothed in strength and courage, too.  
They pressed westward ever westward,  
Where the land was wild and new.  
Pioneers!  
Wearing coonskin, Wearing gingham,



Wearing patience mile on mile,  
They crossed rivers, prairies, mountains,  
Pressing westward all the while.

Pioneers!

Toting rifles, toting kettles,  
Toting faith and hardihood,  
They left comfort far behind them  
For a future they thought good.

Pioneers!

They took little of the riches  
That a wealthy man can boast,  
But their courage, patience, vision,  
Were the coins that matter most.

Pioneers!

The teacher will ask the student pairs to create a definition of a pioneer to share with the class. (pioneer – one of the first explorers, settlers, or colonists of a new country or region)

4. Independent Practice – The teacher will distribute the handout, *The Way West*, (Attachment G) for the students to cut and paste. The *Way West* interactive maps show two different routes to the West: the Oregon Trail and the Mormon Trail.

### **Evaluation of Student Learning**

Objective One, given the poem, *Pioneers*, the students will analyze the content to develop an accurate definition of the term, pioneer (will be assessed by grading the definition students developed for this task.

Objective Two, after hearing second-hand accounts of pioneer life, the students will discuss the hardships endured by the pioneers as they travel across the West, will be assessed through teacher observation.

Objective Three, given a map of the U.S.A. and the westward trails, the student will cut and paste the map and assemble it to accurately show trails traveled by early pioneers, will be assessed through teacher observation.

Objective Four, given a list of words from a passage about westward expansion, the student will write sentences to define the words based on context clues, will be assessed through teacher observation.

Objective Five, given the handout of interactive maps showing two different routes to the West: the Oregon Trail and the Mormon Trail, the student will accurately construct each trail, will be assessed through observing the final product constructed by the student.

### **Lesson Three - Tall Tales of the Westward Movement**

Grade Level/English Proficiency Level for ESOL Learners: Fifth Grade/*ESOL at the Proficient Level*

Nature of Activity/Goal of Lesson: The topic of the lesson includes tall tales of the Wild West  
Objectives:

1. When shown pictures of tall tale characters from the time of westward expansion, students will analyze and identify each of the characters based on their unique qualities and traits (SSS Social Studies, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Growth and Westward Expansion, SS.5.A.6.2).
2. In small groups, the students will construct a body biography, or character development analysis, of one of the tall tale characters and give eight characteristics that accurately describe their character, unique qualities and traits (SSS Language Arts/Reading, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Literary Analysis, LA.5.2.1.2).
3. During a Dinner Party experience, students will articulate answers to questions based on the tall tale character they represent and demonstrate knowledge of the characteristics of the tall tale genre (SSS Language Arts/Reading, Grade Level 5, Big Idea: Literary Analysis, LA.5.2.1.1).

Materials:

Bean, T.W., Readence, J.E., & Baldwin, R.S. (2008). *Content area literacy: An integrated approach*, (9th ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt

Chart paper

Tall Tale Character Transparencies

Index Cards (Seven sets numbered one through 5 –this number will change depending on class size)

Dinner Party handout with questions

Markers

Post-it notes (Think pads)

Candy (multi-flavored for grouping students)

Trade Books:

Brimmer, L. D. ((2004). *Calamity Jane*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books

Kellogg, S. (1988) *Johnny Appleseed*. New York: Scholastic

Kellogg, S. (1992). *Mike Fink*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher

Kellogg, S. (1984) *Paul Bunyan* New York: Scholastic

Kellogg, S. (1986) *Pecos Bill*. New York: Scholastic

Kellogg, S. (1995) *Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett*. New York: Mulberry Paper Book

Lester, J. (1994) *John Henry*. New York: Puffin

Nolen, J. (2003). *Thunder Rose*. Orlando, FL: Voyager Books

Osborne, M.P. (1991) *American Tall Tales*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf

**Procedures**

1. Introduction - The teacher will display transparency pictures of Paul Bunyan, John Henry, Pecos Bill, Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind, Thunder Rose, Calamity Jane, and Johnny Appleseed (Attachment H) without identifying the names of the tall tale characters depicted in each. Students will be asked to try to identify the people in the pictures using prior background knowledge (most will probably not be able to accomplish this task). The teacher will tell the students they will be learning about the characters depicted in the pictures through a genre of folktales called tall tales. The teacher will share the following information:

“Tall Talk, or exaggerated storytelling, began in the 1800s as a way for Americans to come to terms with the vast and inhospitable lands they’d come to inhabit-

thick, dark forests filled with bears and panthers; treeless, arid deserts and plains; towering mountains; and uncharted seacoasts.” The Teacher will read this quote from Osborne, M.P. (1991) *American Tall Tales*.

Historical Background: Storytelling was a popular leisure-time activity during the time in our nation’s history as pioneers were traveling to the West in covered wagons. As the stories were passed along from trail to trail and home to home, they became greatly exaggerated. Some were humorous while others were told of courageous acts and daredevil deeds. Western adventurers, explorers, peace officers and outlaws alike became legendary due to this simple frontier recreation.

The tall-tale characters that will be discussed in this lesson were born from various combinations of historical fact, the storytelling of ordinary people, and the imagination of professional writers.

2. Teacher Modeling - The teacher will read aloud the picture book, *Johnny Appleseed*, retold by Steven Kellogg. As the students listen to the story they will be asked to record any important information they hear about the character, Johnny Appleseed on sticky notes (referred to as “think pads”). The teacher will provide examples of information to record on the think pads; suggesting to the students that they write down ideas from the story such as how the character looked, felt, and acted as the tale unfolds. Students are also asked to include direct quotations and specific words from the story that captures their attention. After reading the story, the teacher will introduce the activity, Body Biographies, a multimedia interpretation of a character in a novel, short story, or major figure in any content area (Bean, Readence, & Baldwin 2008). The teacher will model this strategy before asking students to engage in a small group Body Biography task. The steps to follow in implementing this strategy are as follows:

The teacher will display a large piece of chart paper where the outline of a person’s body has been traced.

The teacher will tell the students they are to refer to their think pads to get ideas about special traits and characteristics Johnny Appleseed possessed.

The teacher will ask for student volunteers to assist him/her in filling in the body outline with representations of the character’s traits, experiences, and relationships learned from the read aloud. Student contributions can include relevant quotations and original text about the character.

The teacher will explain that the placement of words and art are important to consider. For example, a characteristic such as loving or kind could be written over the heart.

Students will be encouraged to use a variety of different colors, symbols, and objects to represent the character.

Johnny Appleseed representations should include an apple, bag of seeds, pan over his head as a hat, overalls, big heart for his generosity, barefoot, nature lover, and wanderer.

3. Guided Practice - The students will select a piece of candy out of a hat and will be separated into their different groups of four to five students. Each group will be given trade books about a tall tale character to read. Group members will be asked to pay particular attention to the special traits and characteristics of the main character in their assigned tall tale. After the story is shared among group members, they will create a Body Biography of their character. The groups will have 20 minutes to complete this activity. Each of the four groups will take turns sharing their Body Biography tall tale character with the class.

4. Independent Practice - Next the teacher will use the Dinner Party strategy from Bean, Readence, & Baldwin (2008). This strategy is based on the idea of inviting characters from a young adult novel to one's home for dinner and conversation. The purpose of dinner party is for students to take on the role of specific characters in response to prompt questions developed by the teacher. This is a great post-reading strategy.

Dinner Party -

One person from each character group will be assigned a number (1 through 5). This will correspond to which table the student will be assigned.

Each Dinner Party will have one of each of the tall tale characters discussed previously (Paul Bunyan, Sally Ann, John Henry, Thunder Rose, Calamity Jane, and Pecos Bill).

The students will break into their group and will be given a handout with seven questions to be used for discussion at the dinner party (Attachment I):

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where have you traveled?
4. Tell us your story.
5. Why is your story important to American History?
6. If you were living in America today, what would be your favorite thing to do? Why?
7. How can you use Facebook to help you on your quest?

The student must be in character while at the dinner party and answer the questions like they are embodying that character.

\*The teacher will act as a moderator and facilitate the group discussions.

## Conclusion

The students will be shown the transparencies (from the introduction component of the lesson) at the end of the lesson and be asked to identify the tall tale characters.

## Evaluation of Student Learning

Objective One, when shown pictures of tall tale characters from the time of westward expansion, students will analyze and identify the each of the characters based on their unique qualities and traits, will be evaluated through student responses.

Objective Two, in small groups, the students will be able to construct a body biography, or character development analysis, of one of the tall tale characters and give eight characteristics that accurately describe their character, unique qualities and traits, will be assessed through teacher observation during group sharing.

Objective Three, during a dinner party experience, students will articulate answers to questions based on the tall tale character they represent and demonstrate knowledge of the characteristics of tall tale genre, will be evaluated through teacher observation.

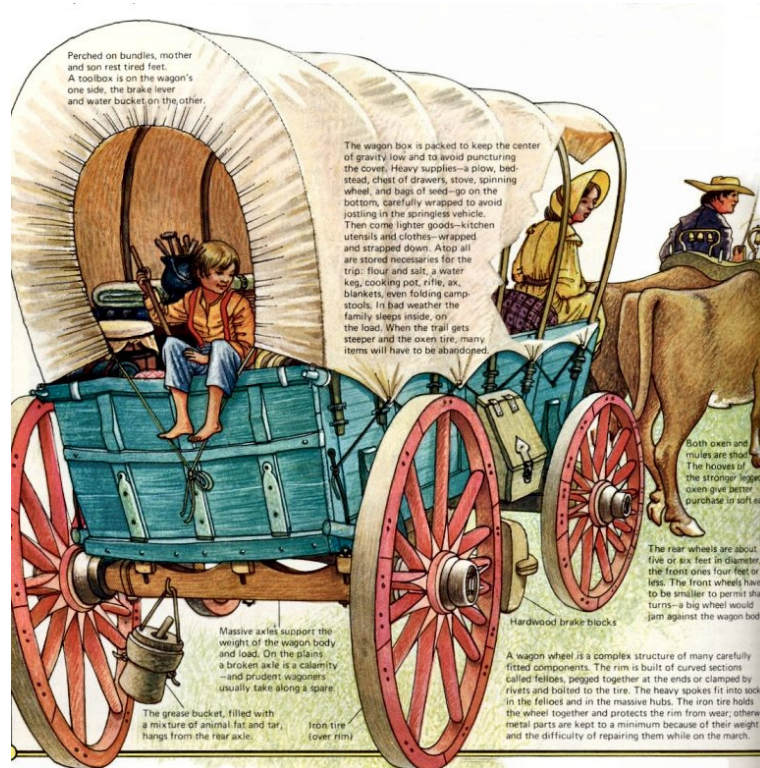
## References

- Bean, T.W., Readence, J.E., & Baldwin, R.S. (2008). *Content area literacy: An integrated approach, (9th ed.)*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt.
- Brimmer, L. D. ((2004). *Calamity Jane*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books.

- Columba, L., Kim, C.Y., & Moe, A.J. (2009). *The power of picture books in teaching math science, and social studies*. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway, Publishers.
- D'Costa, J.W. (2002). Reading books instead of book reviews. In R. Stone (Ed), *Best practices for high school classrooms: What award-winning secondary teachers do* (pp. 169-173). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gregg, M. & Leinhardt, G. (1994). Mapping Out Geography: An Example of Epistemology and Education. *Review of Educational Research, Vol.64, No. 2*.
- Johnson, S. (2004). *Daily geography practice grade 4*. Monterey, CA: Evan Moore.
- Kane, S. (2008). *Integrating literature in the content areas: Enhancing adolescent learning and literacy*. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers, Inc.
- Kellogg, S. (1988) *Johnny Appleseed*. New York: Scholastic.
- Kellogg, S. (1992). *Mike Fink*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher.
- Kellogg, S. (1984) *Paul Bunyan* New York: Scholastic.
- Kellogg, S. (1986) *Pecos Bill*. New York: Scholastic.
- Kellogg, S. (1995) *Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett*. New York: Mulberry Paper Book.
- Lauber, P. (1986). *Volcano: The eruption and healing of Mount St. Helens*. New York: Aladdin.
- Lester, J. (1994). *John Henry*. New York: Puffin.
- Levine, E. (1986). *If you traveled west in a covered wagon*. New York: Scholastic.
- McCoy, I. & Graham, L. (2005). *Hands-on geography*. Greensboro, NC: Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company.
- Milliken, L. (1990). *Frontier American activity book*. Dana Point, CA: Edupress.
- Nolen, J. (2003). *Thunder Rose*. Orlando, FL: Voyager Books.
- Osborne, M.P. (1991) *American Tall Tales*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Silver, D. M. & Wynne, P. J. (2005). *Interactive 3-D maps: American history*. New York: Teaching Resources.

## Attachment C

## The Covered Wagon



The covered wagon used to cross the plains to the west was a smaller, lighter version of the big Conestoga wagon used in the east. The cloth top that protected people and possessions from extreme weather conditions also was the prime reason that the wagon was sometimes referred to as the "prairie schooner". (The view of a wagon train with its billowing tops resembled a fleet of ships sailing over the plains.) A frame of hickory bows held the wagon top. The top could be rolled back for ventilation. Waterproofed with paint or linseed oil, the top was of heavy duty canvas, often made from hemp.

Big wheels helped the wagon roll easily over bumps and dips in the trail, and wide rims helped keep the wagon from sinking into soft ground. The rear wheels were about five or six feet in diameter, the front wheels were four feet or a bit less. The front wheels had to be smaller to permit sharp turns--a big wheel would jam against the wagon body.

The wagon's 10 X 3.5 foot body could take a load of a ton and a half, but most advised to keep the weight below this limit. The lighter the wagon, the less likely it was to bog down in muddy stream banks or prairie sloughs--or to tire the long-suffering teams pulling it. Massive axles supported the weight of the wagon body and load. On the plains a broken axle was a disaster--and prudent wagoners usually took along a spare.

A toolbox was strapped on the wagon's one side, the brake lever and water bucket on the other.

Hanging from the rear axle was the grease bucket, filled with a mixture of animal fat and tar. It was used to keep the hubs of the wheels greased.



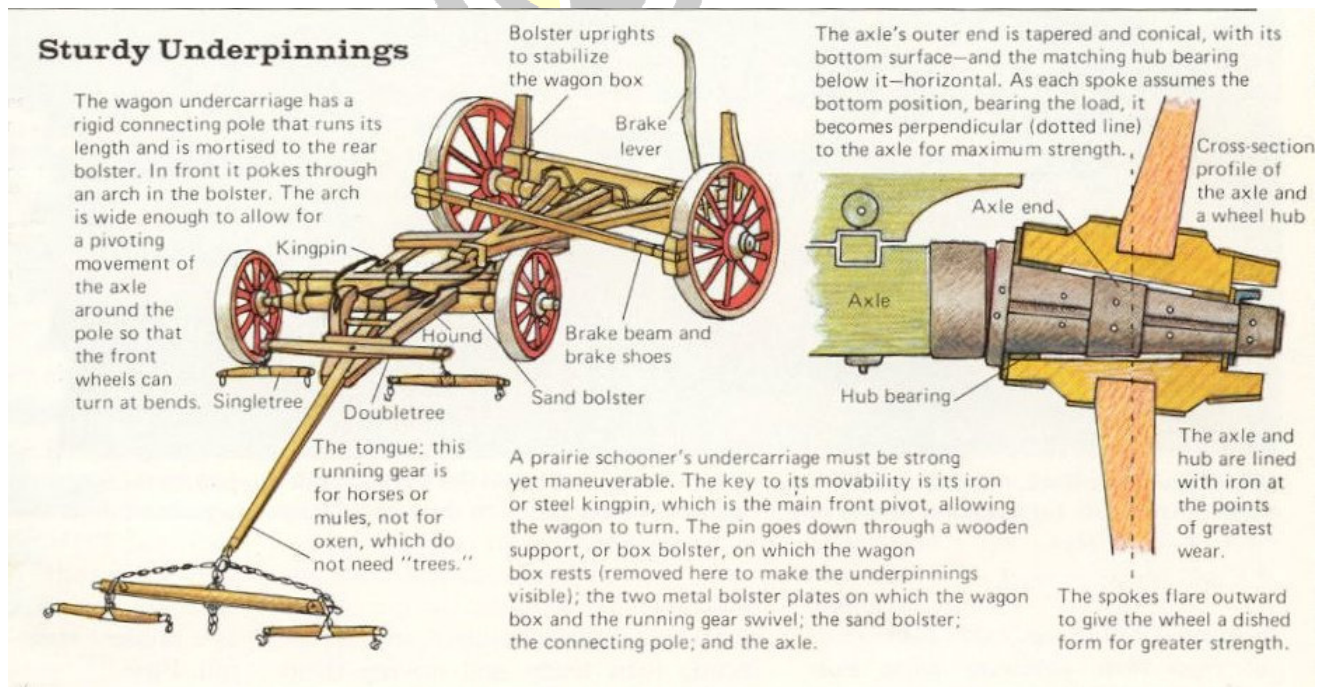
Lariat

Two lariats were needed for every horse and mule, as one generally would wear out before reaching the end of a long journey. Lariats were useful in crossing deep streams, and in letting wagons down steep hills and mountains; also in repairing broken wagons. Lariats made of hemp were the best.



Buckskin

One of the most indispensable articles to the outfit of the prairie traveler is buckskin. For repairing a harness, saddles, bridles, and numerous other daily necessities, the awl (a special tools used by the pioneers) and buckskin were found to be in constant need.



Illus: Story of the Great American West. The Reader's Digest Association, Inc, 1977

The wagon box was packed to keep the center of gravity low and to avoid puncturing the cover.

Heavy supplies like a plow, bed, chest of drawers, stove, spinning wheel, and bags of seed were packed on the bottom, carefully wrapped to avoid jostling in the springless vehicle. Then came lighter goods such as, kitchen utensils and clothes which were wrapped and strapped down. On top were stored necessities for the trip: flour and salt, a water keg, cooking pot, rifle, ax, blankets, and even folding campstools.

By the time the necessities were packed and the prized possessions were loaded there was little room remaining. In decent weather most people cooked, ate, and slept outside. In bad weather the family slept in tents, under the wagon or inside, on the load. As the trip got harder and the teams started to tire, many items would be abandoned alongside the trail.

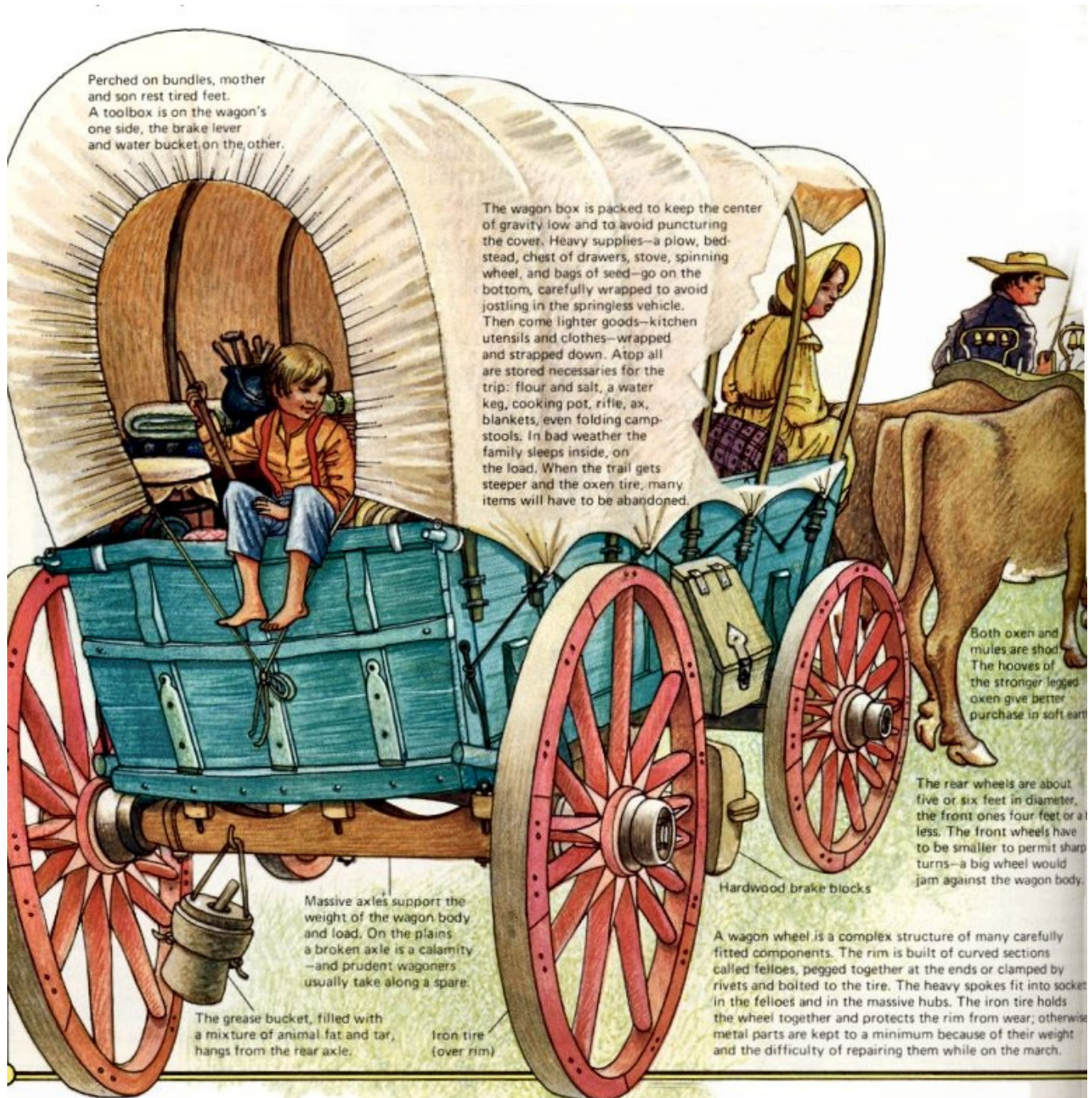
Adapted from: [oregonpioneers.com/wagon.htm](http://oregonpioneers.com/wagon.htm).

### Attachment D





## Pioneers on the Oregon Trail Covered Wagon



## Pioneers of the Westward Expansion of the United States



**Attachment F**

Directions: Read the poem, Pioneers by taking turns reading each stanza with your partner. After reading the poem together with your partner develop a definition for the word pioneer and write it in the space below.



Pioneers

By Aileen Fisher and Olive Rabe

Clothed in buckskin, clothed in homespun,  
Clothed in strength and courage, too.  
They pressed westward ever westward,  
Where the land was wild and new.

Pioneers!

Wearing coonskin, Wearing gingham,  
Wearing patience mile on mile,  
They crossed rivers, prairies, mountains,  
Pressing westward all the while.

Pioneers!

Toting rifles, toting kettles,  
Toting faith and hardihood,  
They left comfort far behind them  
For a future they thought good.

Pioneers!

They took little of the riches  
That a wealthy man can boast,  
But their courage, patience, vision,  
Were the coins that matter most.

Pioneers!

Pioneer can be defined as.....

**Attachment H**



**JOHNNY APFLESEED.**

from "A History of the Pioneer and Modern Times of Ashland County", by H. S. Knapp (1862).



John Henry



Mike Fink



Pecos Bill



Paul Bunyan





Calamity Jane



Sally Ann Crockett



**Attachment I**

Dinner Party



Directions: Each student will take on the role of the tall tale character from the story he/she read and constructed a Body Biography on in his/her group. In the Dinner Party group students will talk with one another answering the following questions from their tall tale character's perspective:

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where have you traveled?
4. Tell us your story.
5. Why is your story important to American History?
6. If you were living in America today, what would be your favorite thing to do? Why?
7. How can you use Facebook to help you on your quest?