

Westward on the Oregon Trail

The wagon train was moving westward along the Oregon Trail. The families walked beside or rode in large, covered wagons pulled by oxen. Each family had only one wagon, but that wagon was able to hold almost everything the family owned.



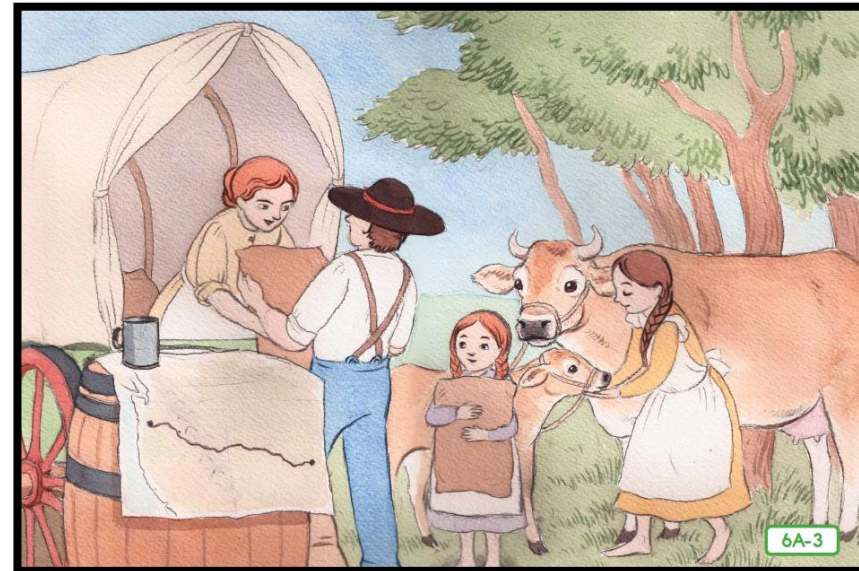
Each family packed food: things like flour, potatoes, and beans. They took clothes, blankets, soap, candles, furniture, pots and pans, china, and rifles. They even had to take barrels of water with them because they weren't sure where they might find clean water along the way. By the time everything was packed in the wagon, there wasn't a whole lot of room for much else!

In addition to the oxen that pulled the wagons, some families brought other animals, such as horses, sheep, and cows. These animals didn't go inside the covered wagons. Instead, they were tied to the wagons with rope and walked behind or beside the wagons.

Many of these families were headed to the Oregon Territory where they planned to settle and make new homes. Back in the East, it had become too expensive for the settlers to be able to own their own land. They hoped that by traveling west, they might find a place to build their own homes. Others chose to go for the adventure of starting a new life.

I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

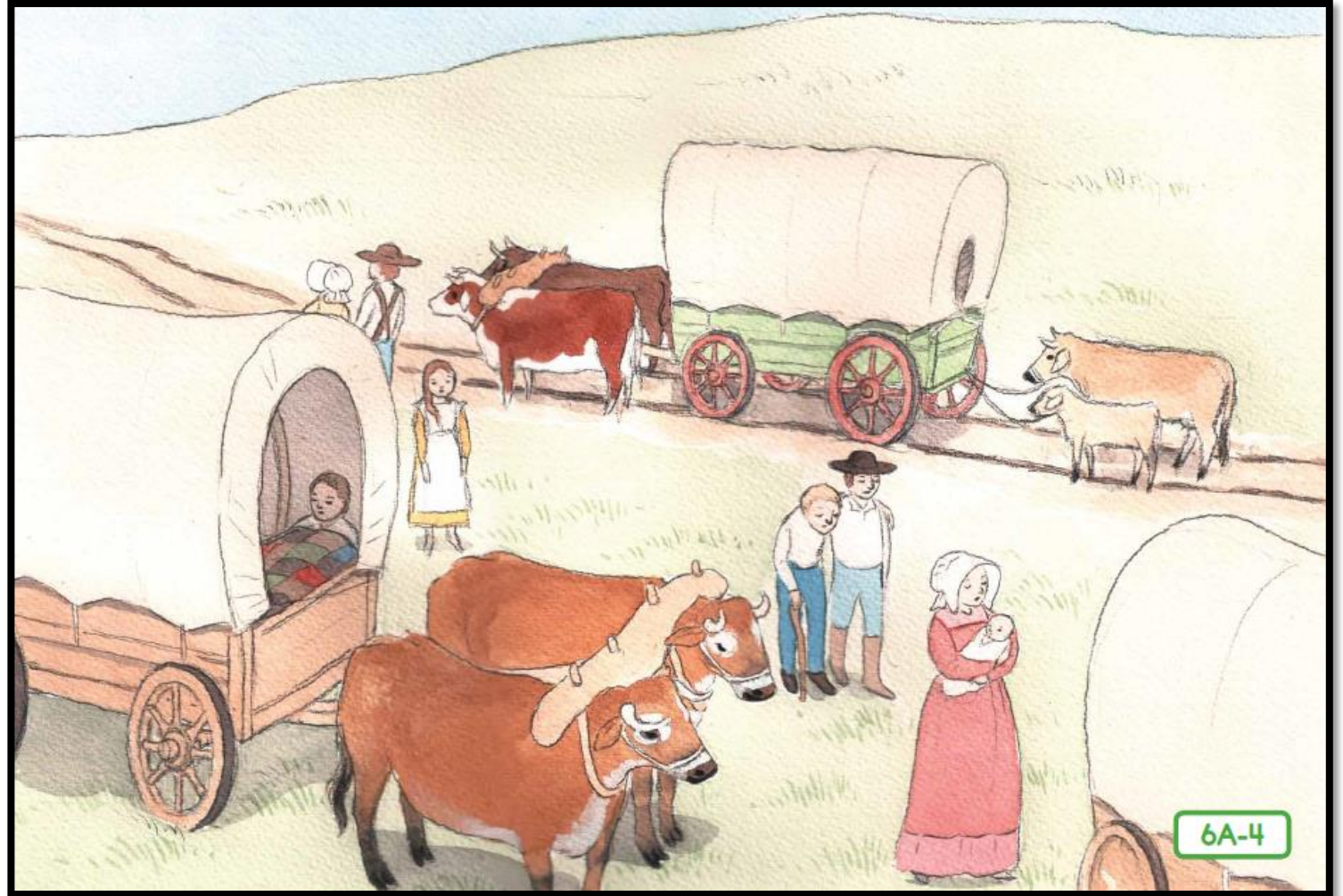
Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste



I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

The road west had been challenging already. The wagon train had been traveling for three long months. The settlers were following a rough, or uneven, trail of wagon ruts to the Oregon Territory. After many wagons followed one path, the ruts became so deep that it was very difficult or even impossible for wagons to travel without getting stuck.



6A-4

I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

As much of the Oregon Trail went through what was known as “Indian Territory,” the travelers encountered Native American tribes along the way. Sometimes the Native Americans were fearful that the settlers would decide to stop traveling and just make farms right there on their lands.

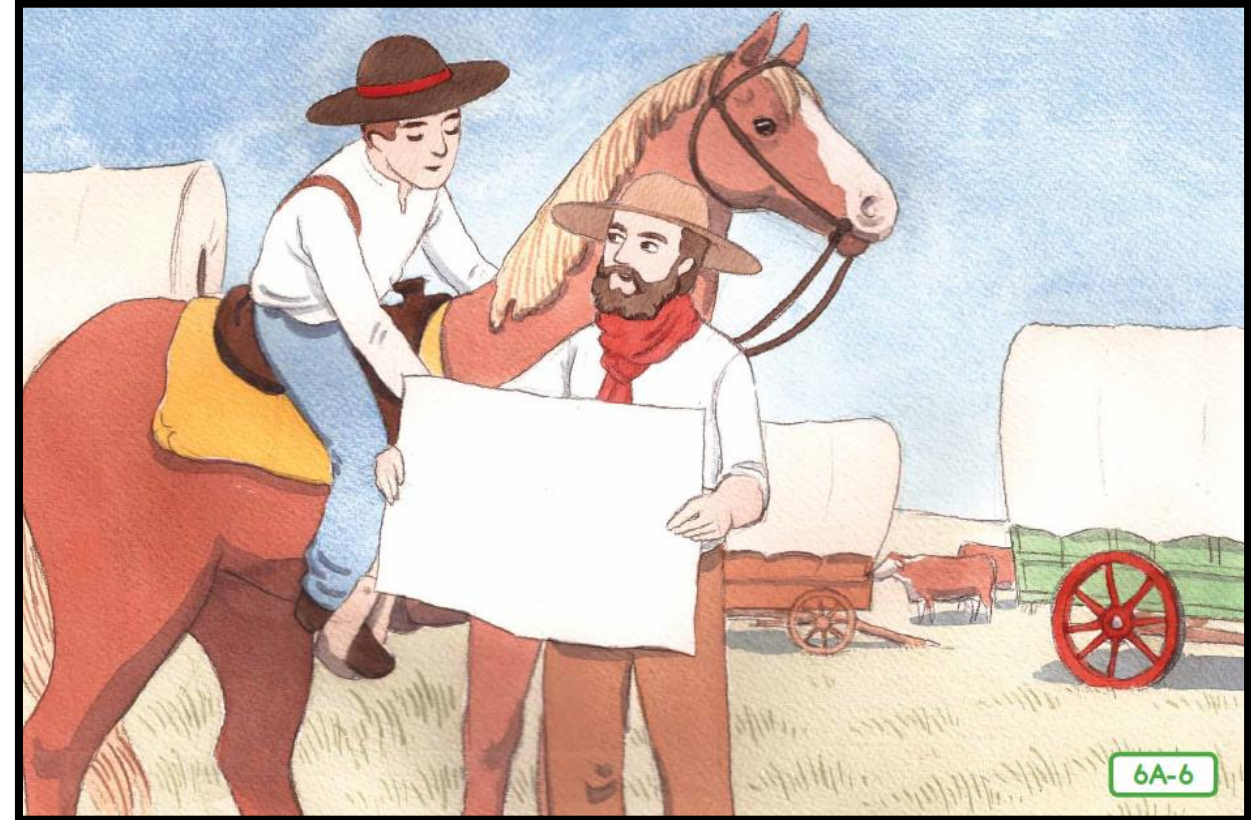


I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

On this particular day, the wagon train moved slowly in one hundred- degree heat. Thomas Lawrence, a settler and the wagon train's scout, rode quickly over to the leader of the wagon train, Captain Jeremiah Ward, to report on the trail ahead.

“There’s water half a mile ahead, but it’s not fit for drinking,” Mr. Lawrence reported. “We ought to reach Sweetwater River by noon, though, and that water is safe.” Captain Ward nodded his thanks, “Good work, Thomas.”



I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

When the wagons reached the Sweetwater River, everyone enjoyed a long, cool drink. Captain Ward ordered, “First we’ll take the wagons and the oxen across the river. Then we’ll swim the extra horses over. The cattle will go last.”

To lighten their loads for the crossing, families removed any heavy objects from their wagons. The settlers brought many of these items to have in their new homes to remind them of their homes back in the East. Now, many of those items they’d hoped to have in their new homes had to be left behind.



I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

Fortunately, everyone crossed safely. Once everyone was across and settled, they refilled their water barrels and canteens. They would need the fresh water for the next portion of their trip. Then they set up camp for the night. They made small campfires over which they cooked their food: beans and bacon.



I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

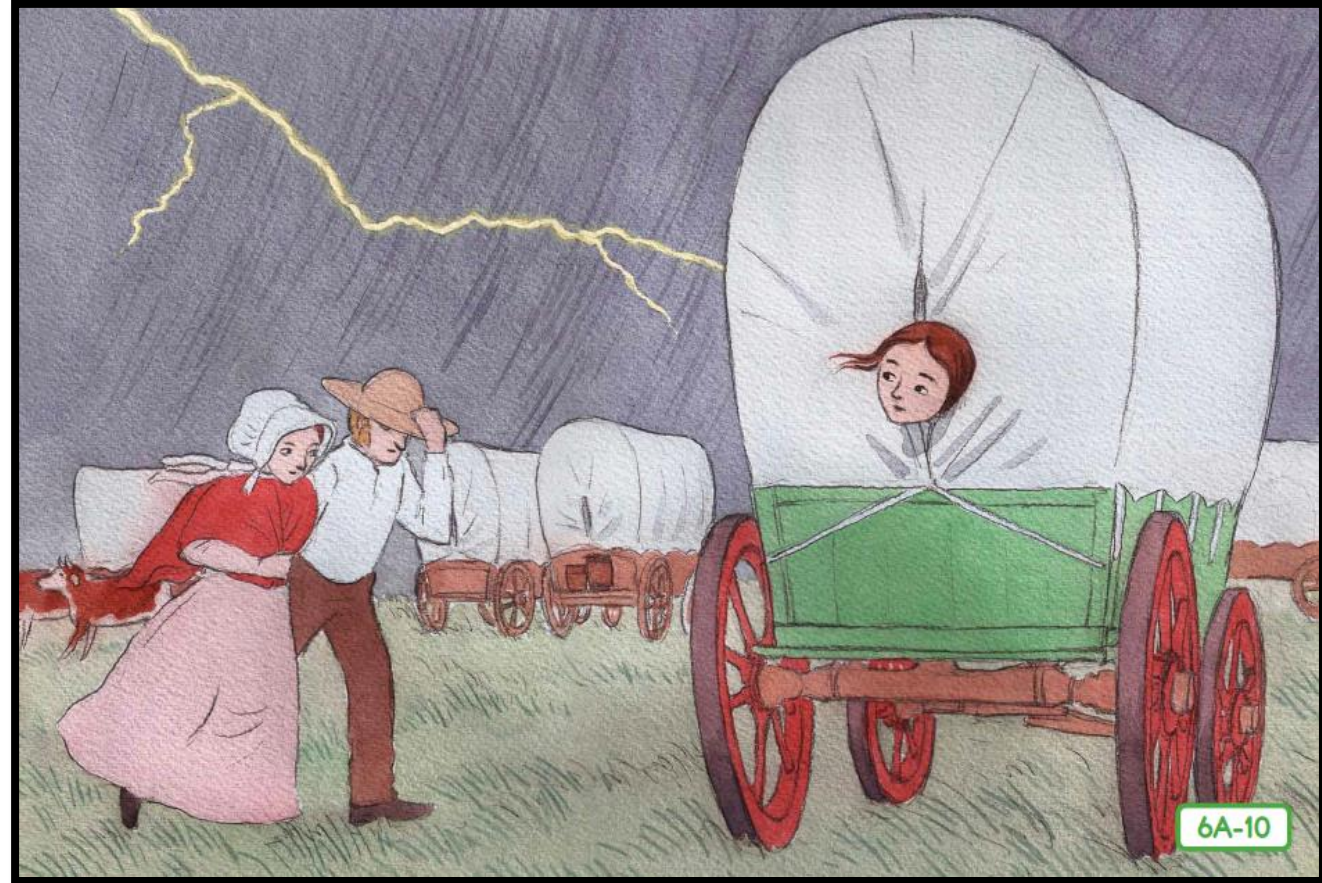
Less than an hour after darkness fell, when most of the travelers were sleeping in their tents or wagons, the wind began to rise, whooshing across the plains. Thomas Lawrence, who was watching the cattle, could hear rumbling off in the distance.



I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

Suddenly a flash of lightning split the night sky. The next instant, a blinding rain fell on the sleeping pioneers. Then, out of nowhere, the wind blew so hard that half the tents blew over. Those who had been in tents ran to their wagons, squeezing into any space they could find amid the furniture and supplies. Still, everyone was already soaking wet, and even tying the canvas flaps shut could not keep some rain from blowing in.



6A-10

I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

Inside the Lawrence family's wagon, everyone huddled together shivering. Nine-year-old Barbara said, "Folks call these wagons 'prairie schooners', Mama, as if they were schooner ships sailing the wide open land instead of the sea. I didn't really think the schooner ships and our prairie schooner were that much alike. But, with the wind rocking the wagon back and forth, I feel as if we really are at sea."

Six-year-old Abigail whispered, "I wish we were home."

At that moment the canvas flaps opened and Thomas Lawrence joined his family inside the wagon. Abigail asked, "Papa, why aren't you with the cattle?"

He explained, "That first lightning bolt spooked them so much that they ran off. We'll have to round them up after the storm."



I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

After a cold, miserable night, the morning dawned cool and gray. Abigail awoke to the sound of a bell. Peering out, she exclaimed, “Why, it’s Snowbell! She’s found her way back!” Sure enough, the Lawrence’s milk cow was standing outside the wagon, ready to be milked. Mr. Lawrence told his wife, “Patricia, have one of the boys milk her. I have an idea.”



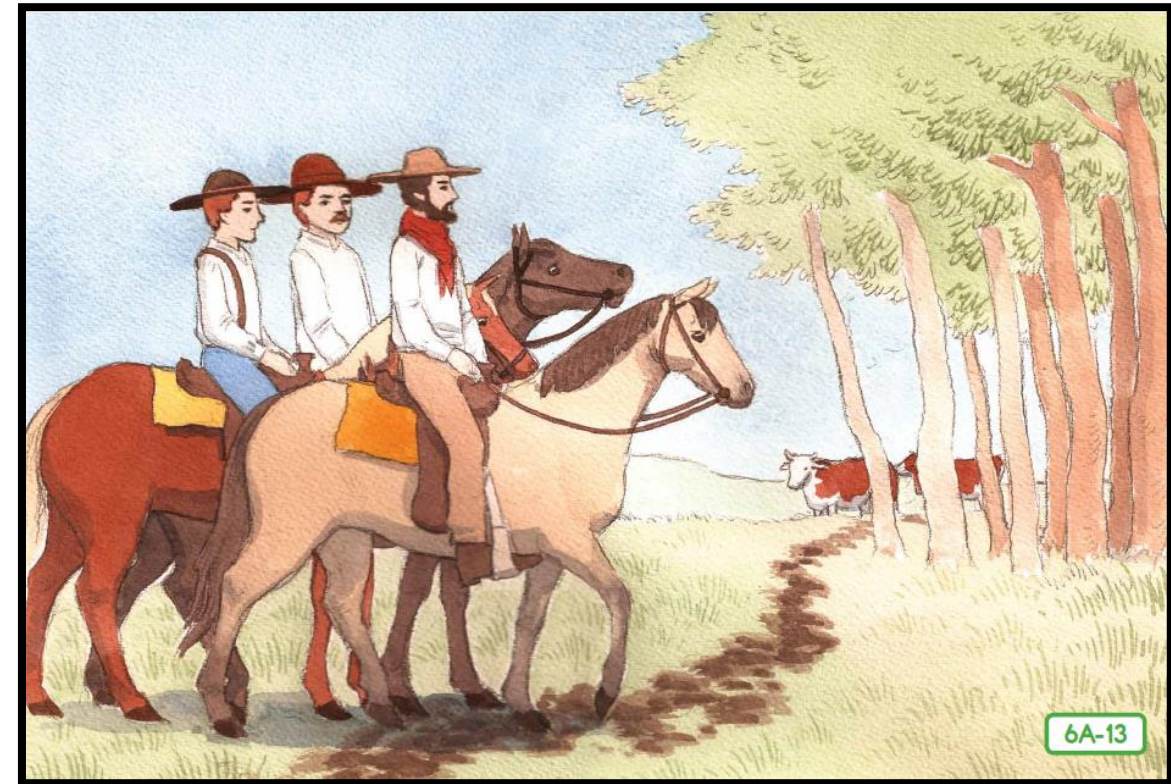
Mr. Lawrence trudged, or walked heavily, through thick mud to Captain Ward's wagon. Captain Ward was already up helping other people. "Our milk cow came home," Mr. Lawrence reported. "If we can follow her tracks, maybe we'll find some of the other animals."

Captain Ward agreed and so on horseback, Thomas Lawrence and some other men followed the cow's tracks back to where she had been. Beyond a grove of trees, they found the missing animals calmly chewing the wet prairie grass as if nothing had happened.

Mr. Lawrence rode back over to his wife near the family wagon and joked, "Well, that certainly was fun." She replied, "Let's hope we've seen the worst of the Oregon Trail." But two months later, the trail presented one last challenge to the pioneers. They were crossing the high mountains of the eastern part of the Oregon Territory on their way to the green valley beyond. That day, Captain Jeremiah Ward and Thomas Lawrence stood together and looked down at the **steep** mountain trail ahead.

I can describe the connection
between the Oregon Trail and
Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre
el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión
Hacia el Oeste



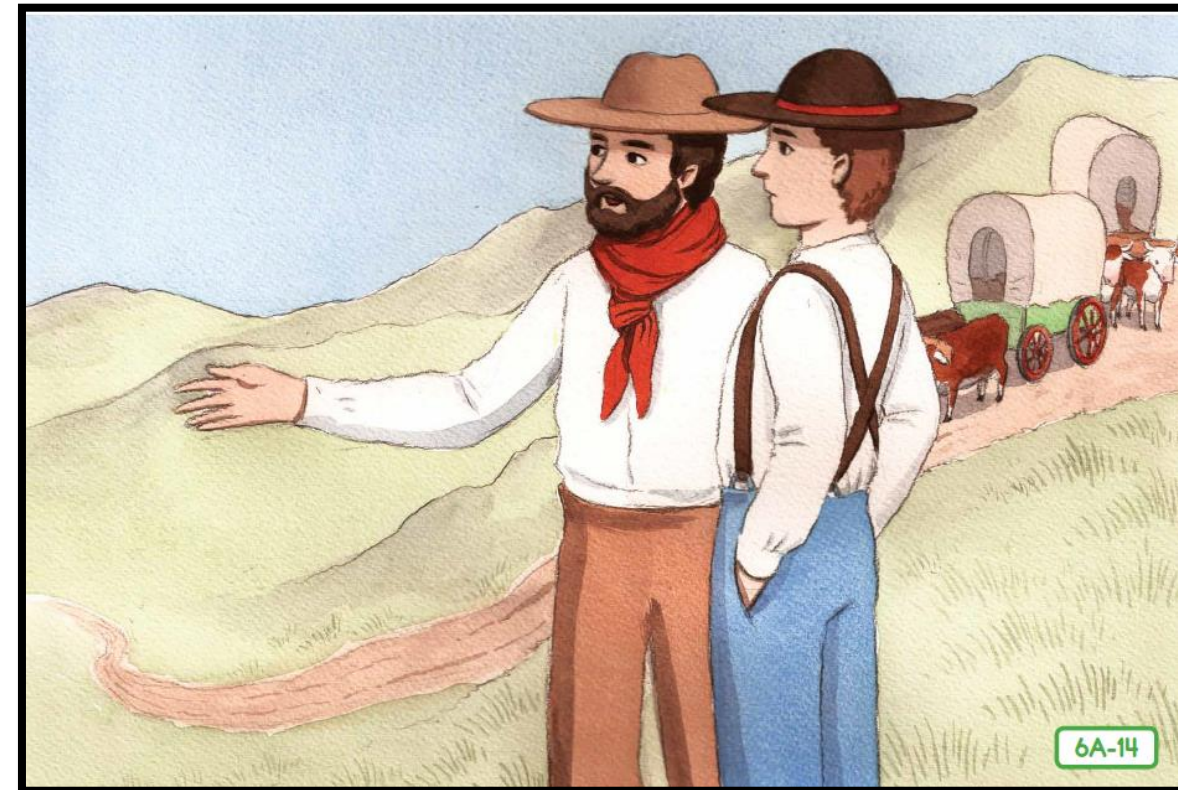
The captain said, “We have to take this steep path down. There’s no other way. If we turn back to take the southern trail, we’d lose too much time. Then we’d never make it out of these mountains before the winter snow hits us.”

Mr. Lawrence agreed. “It is the only way, but it will be difficult. When I scouted ahead,” he said, “I found that the forest crowds in too closely for a wagon to travel on either side of the trail, so we must take the trail itself. At least this extremely steep stretch is fairly short, only about one hundred sixty feet. Then the trail levels out and is in good condition again. Once we make it down the hill, the trail will be much easier.”

Fortunately Captain Ward had a plan. “Tell everyone to unhitch the oxen from the front of the wagons and reconnect them to the back. We’ll walk with them on the paths on either side of the trail, and the oxen will be able to hold the weight of each wagon so that it doesn’t slide down. After the wagons are down, our families can follow on foot. We’ll bring the herds down last.”

I can describe the connection
between the Oregon Trail and
Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre
el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión
Hacia el Oeste

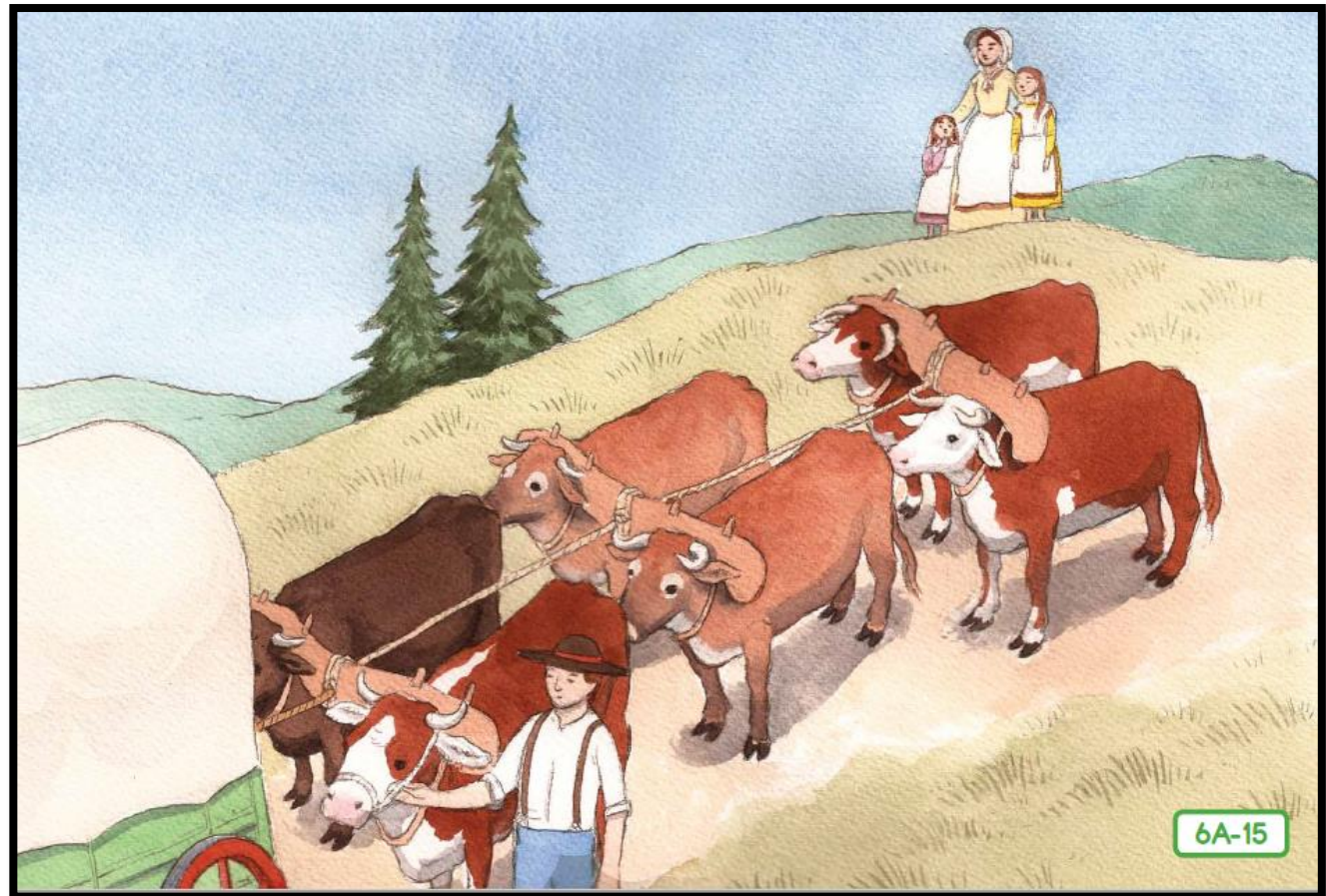


Half an hour later, the first wagon started down the steep trail. Six oxen, attached to the wagon by ropes or chains, strained to keep the Lawrence's wagon under control on the bumpy, uneven surface. Watching from the top of the hill was Mrs. Lawrence and the children. As they watched the wagon descend, Mrs. Lawrence said, "It will be a miracle if my china doesn't shatter to pieces with all that bouncing and banging." After what seemed like a lifetime, there came a cry from the bottom of the incline: "We're down! And everything's in one piece!"

Everyone cheered and Captain Ward ordered the men to move the rest of the wagons. By the end of the day, everyone had made it down to the bottom. That night, camping beside a clean, flowing stream, Captain Ward announced, "Tomorrow we'll be out of these mountains. And then, we're almost . . . home."

I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

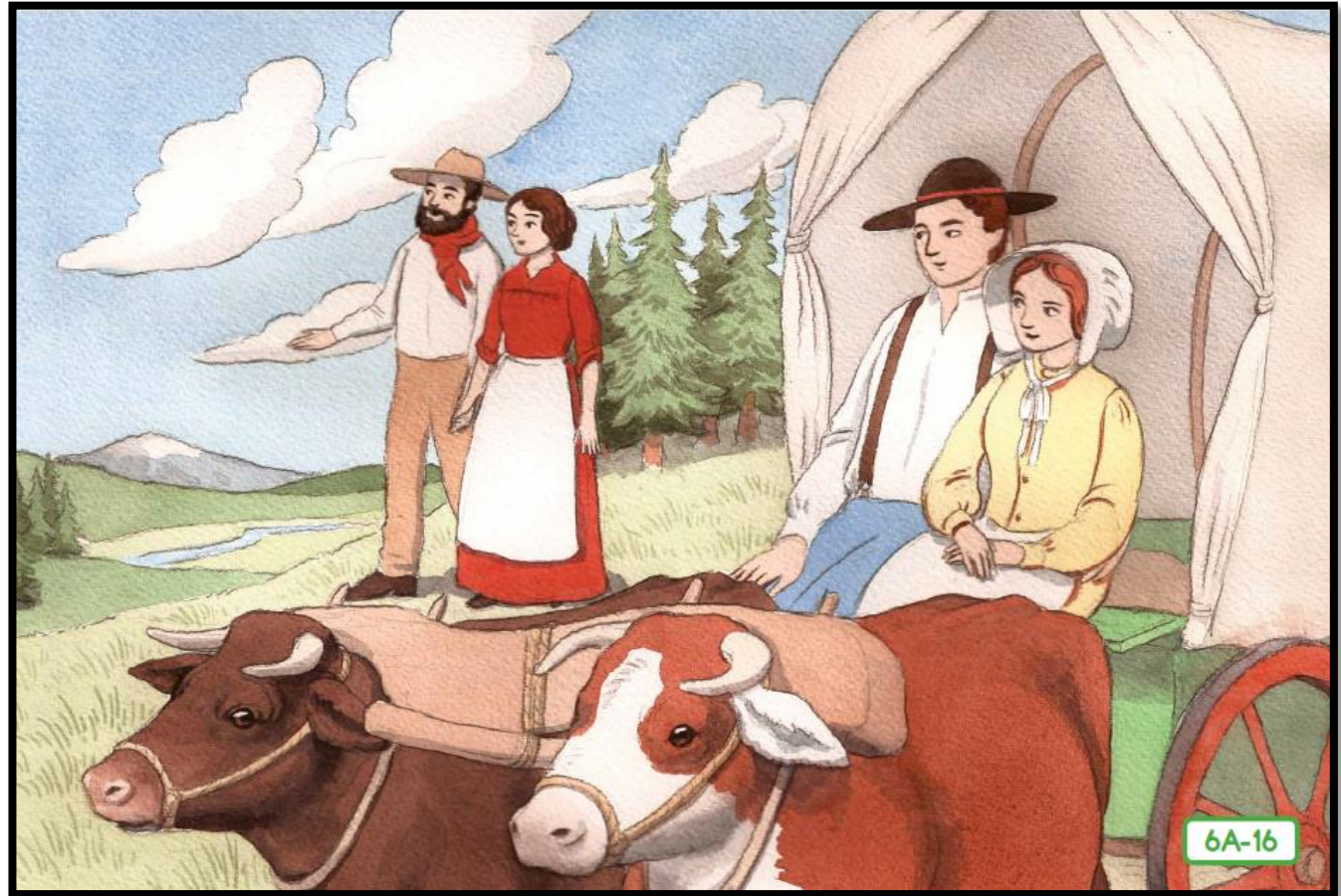


I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

Ten days later, Captain Ward led his wagon train out of a forest and into a lush, green valley spread out as far as the eye could see.

As each wagon emerged from the trees and each family saw the valley ahead, everyone fell silent. This was the place that the travelers had dreamed about and worked to reach through six months of hardships, or difficulties, and laughter, rain and hail, wind and heat.



I can describe the connection between the Oregon Trail and Westward Expansion.

Yo puedo describir la conexión entre el Sendero de Oregon y la Expansión Hacia el Oeste

Comprehension Check

- 1. *Evaluative* What was the main topic of the read-aloud?
- 2. *Literal* What was the Oregon Trail?
- 3. *Literal* How did pioneer families travel on the Oregon Trail? About how long did it take a pioneer family to travel the Oregon Trail?
- 4. *Inferential* Why did some families decide to pack all of their belongings in covered wagons and move to the Oregon Territory?
- 5. *Inferential* Did families usually travel by themselves on the Oregon Trail or in groups? Why do you think families traveled in wagon trains with a scout riding ahead of them rather than by themselves?
- 6. *Inferential* Who already lived in the territory, or area, through which the Oregon Trail passed? How did they feel about the settlers on the Oregon Trail?
- 7. *Inferential* What difficulties did families face as they traveled on the Oregon Trail?