What effects did landforms have on the route of the Oregon Trail?

By Daphne Faulk

Overview: In the early 1840's Americans were rethinking the current boundaries of their country. Most citizens had heard of what Lewis and Clark had found on their journey and many began to dream of a new life in the new land. The government had policies that gave these pioneers amounts of land, that for a variety of reasons, they could not have obtained in the states at that time. This offer of free land, along with the desire to be a part of American settlement history, drew large amounts of immigrants on a journey that would forever change the shape of our country. This lesson introduces students to the concept of the route this journey took and the geographic landforms that effected that route.

Connection with Curriculum: Oregon Content Standards addressed:

*Locate places and explain geographic information or relationships by reading, interpreting, and preparing maps and other geographic representations.
*Understand the distribution and movement of people, ideas and products.

Oregon grade 5 Benchmarks addressed:

Examine and prepare maps, charts, and other visual representations to locate places and interpret geographic information.
*Identify patterns of migration and cultural interaction in the United States.

Other links to curriculum: Reading, Math

National Geography Standards Addressed:
Standard #1 How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.
Standard #4 The physical and human characteristics of places.
Standard #9 The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface.
Standard #12 The processes, patterns, and functions of human settlement.
Standard #17 How to apply geography to interpret the past.

Grade Level: 4th grade

Objectives: Students will:

Identify beginning and ending locations of the Oregon Trail.
Draw a transect line from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City, Oregon.
Identify major bodies of water and landforms that occur on the transect line.
Graph the amount of landforms on the transect line.
Interpret the effect of those landforms on the route taken by the immigrants.

Materials:

United States Maps-one per student
Our Oregon textbooks
Rulers-one per student
Data collection paper (blank paper)
Atlas/maps showing bodies of water, elevation, and major landforms-
preferably one that uses shading to show mountains
Graph paper
Overhead
Transparency of the United States map
Transparency pen
Chart paper
Wide-tip felt pen
Masking tape or wall hanging device
Graph paper transparency
For the continuation-Small group sets of historical novels, such as Rachel's Journal and Facing West
Reading journals

Procedure:

To help students identify the "jumping off" points and ending destination of the Oregon Trail:

1. Read and discuss the related pages in an Oregon history textbook, such as Our Oregon.

For the mapping activity:

2. Distribute the student's copy of a United States map and atlases.
3. Ask students to recall the main jumping off point of the Oregon Trail and model labeling Independence, Missouri and the overhead map.
4. Ask students to recall the main destination of the Oregon Trail and model labeling Oregon City, Oregon on the overhead map. Tell students that there were other destinations in the Oregon territory, especially in the Willamette Valley, but for this activity Oregon City will be used as the main destination.
5. Have students use their rulers to draw a straight line from Independence to Oregon City.
6. Remind students that travel routes rarely follow a straight line and tell them that by the end of this activity they will understand the geographic effects on the route of the Oregon Trail.

7. Have students ready their data collection paper by dividing it into quarters. Label each section with one of these titles: bodies of water, mountains, plains and plateaus, and valleys.
8. Review the definitions of each of these categories, especially identifying the elevation of the mountains, plains, plateaus, and valleys. (This would have been learned prior to this lesson) Teacher writes the working definitions on chart paper and displays this information for the length of the activity.
9. Beginning with Independence and moving along the diagonal transect line, model using the atlas/map to identify changes in elevation, and any bodies of water that occur on the line.
10. Record each occurrence on the data collection sheet in the correct category.
11. After several points have been modeled, allow students to continue gathering the information independently. Allow for students to clarify ideas with each other as the teacher circulates, checking for understanding and questioning as needed.
12. When students have identified the landforms and bodies of water that occurred along the transect line with the names from the atlas/map or height of mountain, plain/plateau, and valley, orally review and discuss each item from their lists. (Students may need to number the mountains, plains and plateaus and valley using tally marks) Use the working definitions to agree on items. Reach a flexible degree of consensus.
13. Distribute graph paper.
14. Label vertical axis with numbers from 0 to 20. Label horizontal axis with each of the four labels from the data collection.
15. Teacher models graphing (basic bar graph) on the overhead for all categories. Students fill in their own graphs.
16. Discuss how many items were found in each category. Identify patterns such as crossing a river more than once and climbing steep mountains.
17. Ask students for their interpretations of the information and ask questions as needed like: How would that effect traveling in a covered wagon? Could a wagon make it up a steep mountain? Didn't they already cross that river once?
18. Lead the discussion to the conclusion that the pioneers would need to adjust their route because of the geography of the land.
19. Ask the students for their suggestions in navigating the course.
20. Tell students that they are now going to read journals about pioneers on the Oregon Trail. Tell them to look for ways the pioneers adjusted the route and dealt with the geography of the land. Ask them to record these methods in their reading journals using a T chart listing the geography and method of solution.

Assessment: During the mapping activity teacher observation would be used along with specific questioning of individual students. While students are gathering the data the teacher would circulate and write a short narrative about any student needing reteaching at a later time. At the end of the activity, the data collection sheet and graph would be collected for teacher review and comment or possibly scored with a class generated scoring guide.

Modifications: During the activity some students might need to work with a partner to gain meaning and complete the process. Individual students might need to have a graph labeled by a classmate or given by the teacher.
Extensions: Students who have mastered this procedure could be challenged to select another route of migration or common travel route, possibly other westward trails such as the California or Mormon Trail. They could draw a transect line and gather data about bodies of water and landforms that occur on that line. To show learning from independent work, students could write about their own interpretations and the conclusions that they drew from the information gathered.

Model lesson scoring guide

This scoring guide addresses all parts of the activity including coope
and individual accountability.

Expectation-based Scoring Guide for use with the Oregon Trail Transect

Meeting the expectations:

- Drew a basically correct transect line.
- Used atlas or place mat map to correctly count the number of mountains, valleys, plains, plateaus, or rivers. determines (The group the correct amount.)
- Constructed a complete graph using all the groups' data.
- Actively participated in the examination of the map.
- Encouraged others to participate.

Exceeding the expectations: To receive an exceeding the expectations students need to fulfill the meeting the expectations criteria and at following;

Drew a precisely correct transect line.

Used atlas or place mat map to count and analyze number of mountains, plains, plateaus, valleys, or rivers.

Added analysis statements to group discussion.

Assumed a leadership role within the group in a kindly manner.

Completed the project with high quality and neatness.

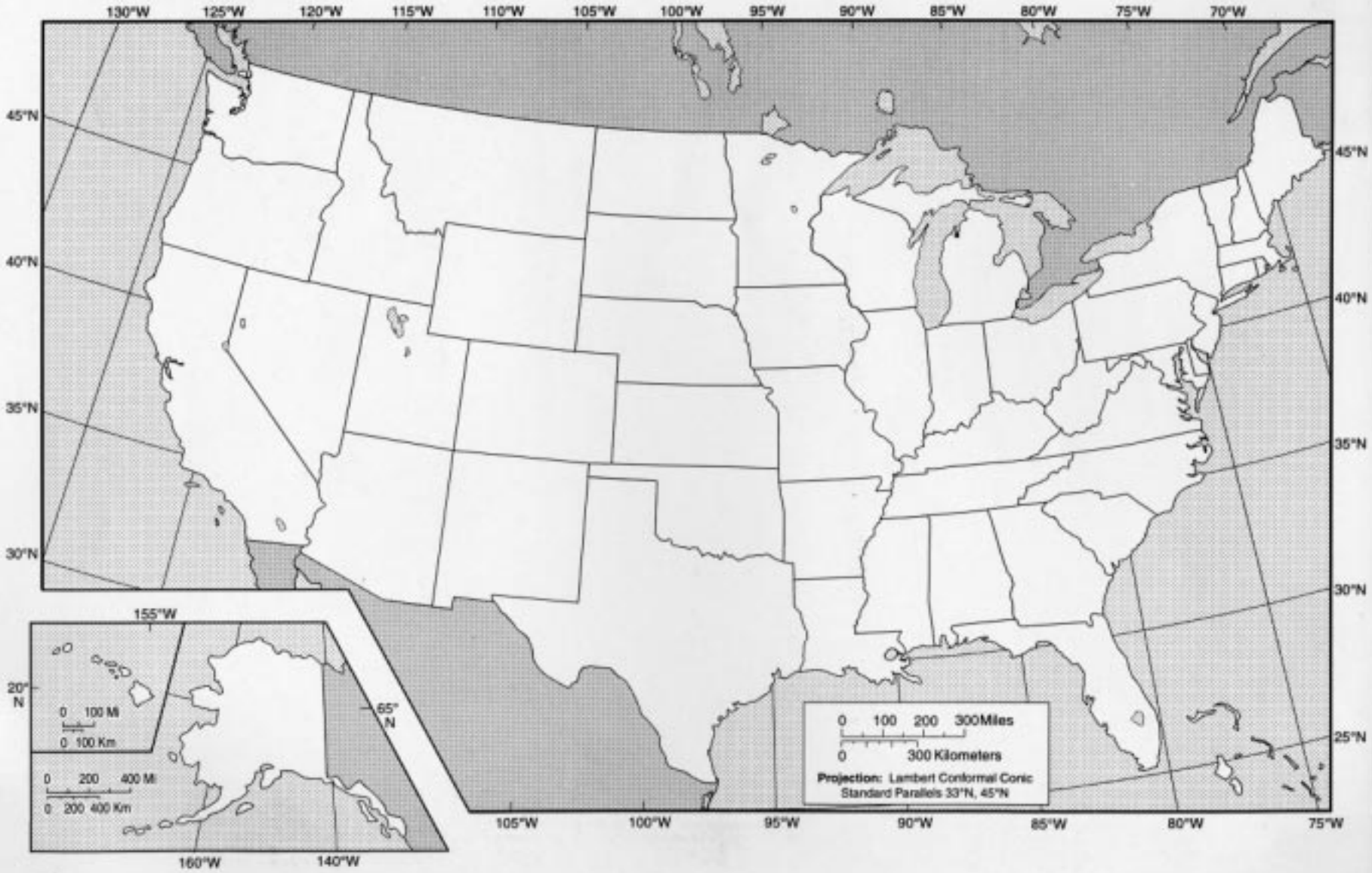
Does not meet the expectations:

Did not draw a complete transect line.

Did not participate in counting the number of mountains, plateaus,valleys, or rivers.

Did not complete the graph.

The United States



National Council for Geographic Education
16A Leonard Hall
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705-1087
ph. (724) 357-6290 email ncge-org@grove.iup.edu

ARIZONA GEOGRAPHIC ALLIANCE