

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Lesson Title—Two Pioneer Descriptions of Oregon in 1847

From Sean Gilligan

Grade: 9-12

Length of class period: 60 minutes

Inquiry (what essential questions are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

-How could descriptions for the same place (Oregon) be so different? What would be the reasons for this?

-By looking at the primary sources, what were some positive and negative descriptive details about Oregon?

-If you were alive in 1847 America, would you have journeyed to Oregon?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

-Students will interpret two primary source accounts describing Oregon in 1847. This will be accomplished through reading and writing.

-Students will evaluate why two descriptions on the same place can be so different.

-Students will evaluate whether they themselves would have journeyed to the Oregon Country. This will be accomplished through writing.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?)-(please attach)

“Two Pioneers Describe Oregon (1847)” Primary Source Accounts

Oregon Country Descriptions Primary Sources Analysis Sheet

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

Before this primary sources lesson, students should have already learned about the Oregon Trail and Oregon Country through their text or other sources. For initiation, students will be asked who has visited Puerto Rico (or any other location where at least two students in the class have visited). Two students will share verbal descriptions of the location. Then students will be asked if they notice any differences in the descriptions and to explain why these differences might exist. It will be noted that the class will now look at descriptions of Oregon from two pioneers in 1847. The primary sources will be read together as a class, so that vocabulary can be explained. At the end of Hezekiah Packingham's account, students will be asked to share what they notice about Oregon. The same will be done after Richard R. Howards' account is read. After the discussion, students will complete the Oregon Country Descriptions Primary Sources Analysis Sheet. The writing could possibly go into the next class session. For closure, at the next class session, some students will share their responses to part C and part D of the analysis sheet. Thus, they will share why they think the accounts are so different and also what choices they would have made about moving to Oregon in 1847. Another good closure question could be: "When making an important decision in life like choosing a college, what must you keep in mind?" Thus, students can make connections with their own lives.

How will you assess what students learned during this lesson?

- Verbal responses during discussions and closure
- Completed Primary Sources Analysis Sheet

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards—

Standard 1-Content Knowledge

1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States history.
High School 1. Investigate the causes and effects of migration within the United States (e.g., westward movement)

1.6 Describe patterns of human movement across time and place.
High School 33. Analyze migration patterns within and among nations.

Standard 2- History/Social Studies Literacy

2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources including electronic media.

High School 1. Find relevant and accurate information from a variety of sources to answer a history/social studies question.

2.3 Create various forms of written work to demonstrate an understanding of history and social studies issues.

High School 7. Create written work that analyzes a historical event, place, or person.

**Oregon Country Descriptions
Primary Sources Analysis Sheet**

Name: _____

Answer the following items in complete sentences.

A) What are five examples that Hezekiah Packingham gives for why people should not move to Oregon?

B) What are five examples that Richard R. Howard gives for why people should move to Oregon?

C) Why do you think that these accounts of the same location (Oregon Country) are so different? Explain.

D) Pretend you live in Illinois in 1847. You have read both Hezekiah's and Richard's letters describing Oregon. Would you decide to try your luck in Oregon or would you stay in Illinois? Respond to this question in two paragraphs and use evidence from the letters to explain your choice.

Two Pioneers Describe Oregon (1847)

Hezekiah Packerham to his Brother, Willamette Valley, March 1, 1847

I arrived in the Wallamette Valley on the 30th of September, and my calculations are all defeated about Oregon. I found it a mean, dried up, and drowned country. The Yam Hill is a small valley, destitute of timber. I soon got sick of this place, and then went to the mouth of the Columbia river. I can give Oregon credit for only one or two things, and these are, good health and plenty of salmon, and Indians; as for the farming country there is none here---wheat grows about the same as in Illinois; corn, potatoes, and garden vegetables cannot grow here without watering. The nights are too cold here in summer. The soil is not as good as in Illinois--the face of the country is hilly, and high mountains covered with snow all summer, and small valleys---the mountains and hills are covered with the heaviest timber that I ever saw. We have had a very hard winter here, snow fell two feet deep, and lay three weeks, by reason of which hundreds of cattle have died of starvation. The thermometer fell to three degrees above zero. Prairie grass here is the same as in Illinois. There is no timothy nor clover. Mechanics are very numerous here. Of the ships that sailed from New York last April, but one arrived, and she was ice bound for 50 days, in latitude 50 1-2. It is supposed the other has gone to her long home. A United States man-of-war (*Shark*) was recently wrecked at the mouth of the Columbia. Money is very scarce here---and they have a kind of currency here (orders on stores and scrip)---they value property very high, but if they would put things at cash prices, they would be about the same as they are in the States. Oregon is rapidly filling up with young men, (but no girls) of whom two-thirds are dissatisfied and many would return to the States if they were able, but the road is long and tedious, and it is hard for families to get back; my trip was pleasant until I got to the South Pass---after that the country was rugged, and bad roads. Tell young men if they intend coming to Oregon, to drive no teams unless it is their own. We were uninjured by the Indians, though they were very saucy---they have no manners; they worship idols [totem poles?], and I saw one of their gods at the mouth of the river. There is no society here except the Camelites [Campbellites]. I shall return to the States next spring. Don't believe all that is said about Oregon, as many falsehoods are uttered respecting the country.

Hezekiah Packerham

Richard R. Howard to a Friend in Illinois, "Oregon Territory," April 6, 1847

We arrived safe in Oregon City on the 12th of September last. We reached Fort Laramie in 42 days from Independence; Fort Hall in 33 days more; the Dalles in 37 days more; and Oregon

City in 16 days more---making in all 128 days. Our journey was two weeks longer than necessary had we lost no time. We met with no serious obstructions on our journey. We had to raise the front of our wagon beds two or three inches in crossing the Laramie Fork to keep the water out; sometimes we had long drives to find a good place for camping, with water and grass. No single man should come to this country. One third of the men in Oregon at this time are without wives. Nothing but men of families are wanted here to till the soil, to make this one of the greatest countries in the world. This country does not get so muddy as Illinois. There is no dust in summer here. The good land in this country is more extensive than I expected to find it. The hills are not so high as represented. From the Cascade mountains to the Pacific, the whole country can be cultivated. The natural soil of the country, especially in the bottoms, is a black loam, mixed with gravel and clay. We have good timber; but there appears to be a scarcity of good building rock. The small streams furnish us with trout year round.

My wife to the old lady---Greeting; says she was never more satisfied with a move in her life before; that she is fast recovering her health; and she hopes you will come to Oregon, where you can enjoy what little time you have remaining in health.

The roads to Oregon are not as bad as represented. Hastings in his history speaks of the Falls of Columbia being 50 feet and roaring loud, making the earth tremble, etc. The falls are about like that of a mill-dam. Every thing in this country now is high, except molasses, sugar and salt; but when we raise our wheat crop to trade on, we will make them pay for their high charges. I think no place where a living is to be made out of the earth can be preferable to Oregon for that purpose---and let people say what they may---all agree that it is healthy. It is certainly the healthiest country in the world, disease is scarcely known here, except among the late emigrants, ninety-nine out of a hundred of them get well the first season. I have heard of only two deaths since I have been in Oregon; one of them was a man who came here diseased and in one year died; the other was a woman who it is said was near dead ten years before she came here.

Richard R. Howard

Both primary sources were collected in Dale Morgan's *Overland in 1846: Diaries and Letters of the California-Oregon Trail*, volume 2 (1963).