

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Analysis of the Diary of Narcissa Whitman

Grade - 7

Length of class period –**One Class Period**

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

What challenges and dangers were faced by the settlers of the American West?

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

The student will analyze orally and in writing, a first hand account of the journey into the western United States.

The students will describe the experiences and challenges faced by the settlers of the American West.

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

The first attachment is a worksheet with a question attached to each excerpt of the Diary of Narcissa Whitman.

The second attachment is the answer sheet for the Diary worksheet.

The third attachment is the complete version of the Diary (as far as I know).

DIARIES AND JOURNALS OF NARCISSA WHITMAN 1836

PLATTE RIVER, JUST ABOVE THE FORKS, JUNE 3RD, 1836.

Dear Sister Harriet and Brother Edward: Friday eve, six o'clock. We have just encamped for the night near the bluffs over against the river. The bottoms are a soft, wet plain, and we were obliged to leave the river yesterday for the bluffs. The face of the country yesterday afternoon and today has been rolling sand bluffs, mostly barren, quite unlike what our eyes have been satiated with for weeks past. No timber nearer than the Platte, and the water tonight is very bad - got from a small ravine. We have usually had good water precious to this.

1. Describe the importance of water on this journey. (What are the uses of water?)

Our fuel for cooking since we left timber (no timber except on rivers) has been dried buffalo dung; we now find plenty of it and it answers a very good purpose, similar to the kind of coal used in Pennsylvania (I suppose now Harriet will make up a face at this, but if she was here she would be glad to have her supper cooked at any rate in this scarce timber country). The present time in our journey is a very important one. The hunter brought us buffalo meat yesterday for the first time. Buffalo were seen today but none have been taken. We have some for supper tonight. Husband is cooking it - no one of the company professes the art but himself. I expect it will be very good. Stop - I have so much to say to the children that I do not know in what part of my story to begin. I have very little time to write. I will first tell you what our company consists of. We are ten in number; five missionaries, three Indian boys and two young men employed to assist in packing animals.

2. What are the sources of fuel?

3. What people, animals and items make up the company of travelers?

Saturday, 4th. I wish I could describe to you how we live so that you can realize it. Our manner of living is far preferable to any in the States. I never was so contented and happy before neither have I enjoyed such health for years. In the morning as soon as the day breaks the first that we hear is the words, "Arise! Arise!" - then the mules set up such a noise as you never heard, which puts the whole camp in motion. We encamp in a large ring, baggage and men, tents and wagons on the outside, and all the animals except the cows, which are fastened to pickets, within the circle. This arrangement is to accommodate the guard, who stand regularly every night and day, also when we are in motion, to protect our animals from the approach of Indians, who would steal them. As I said, the mules' noise brings every man on his feet to loose them and turn them out to feed.

4. Why do you think she said that she was happier and healthier than while she lived in the States?

Now, H. and E., you must think it very hard to have to get up so early after sleeping on the soft ground, when you find it hard work to open your eyes at seven o'clock. Just think of me - every morning at the word, "Arise!" we all spring. While the horses are feeding we get breakfast in a hurry and eat it. By this time the words, "Catch up! Catch up," ring through the camp for moving. We are ready to start usually at six, travel till eleven, encamp, rest and feed, and start again about two; travel until six, or before, if we come to a good tavern, then encamp for the night. ...

5. Describe a typical day for the travelers. (What they did first, second, third, ...?)

...Tell mother I am a very good housekeeper on the prairie. I wish she could just take a peep at us while we are sitting at our meals. Our table is the ground, our table-cloth is an India-rubber cloth used when it rains as a cloak; our dishes are made of tin-basins for teacups, iron spoons and plates, each of us, and several pans for milk and to put our meat in when we wish to set it on the table. Each one carries his own knife in his scabbard, and it is always ready to use. When the table things are spread, after making our own forks or sticks and helping ourselves to chairs, we gather around the table.... Let me assure you of this, we relish our food none the less for sitting on the ground while eating. We have tea and a plenty of milk, which is a luxury in this country. our milk has assisted us very

much in making our bread since we have been journeying.... I never saw any thing like buffalo meat to satisfy hunger. We do not want any thing else with it. I have eaten three meals of it and it relishes well. Supper and breakfast we eat in our tent. We do not pitch it at noon. Have worship immediately after supper and breakfast....

6. List and describe the tools/items used to eat with at meal times.

7. What are some of the foods that they ate?

...25th. - Came fifteen miles to-day; encamped on Smith's creek, a small branch of Bear creek. The ride has been very mountainous - paths winding on the sides of steep mountains. In some places the path is so narrow as scarcely to afford room for the animal to place his foot. One after another we pass along with cautious step. Passed a creek on which was a fine bunch of gooseberries, nearly ripe.

Husband has had a tedious time with the wagon to-day. It got stuck in the creek this morning when crossing, and he was obliged to wade considerably in getting it out. After that, in going between the mountains, on the side of one, so steep that it was difficult for horses pass, the wagon was upset twice; did not wonder at this at all; it was a greater wonder that it was not turning somersaults continually. It is not very grateful to my feelings to see him wearing out with such excessive fatigue, as I am obliged to. He is not as fleshy as he was last winter. All the most difficult part of the way he has walked, in laborious attempts to take the wagon. Ma knows what my feelings are....

...Aug. 13th. - Saturday; We have come fifteen miles and have had the worst route in all the journey for the cart. We might have had a better one but for being misled by some of the company who started out before the leaders. It was two o'clock before we came into camp.

The river is divided by two islands into three branches, and is fordable. The packs are placed upon the tops of the highest horses and in this way we crossed without wetting. Two of the tallest horses were selected to carry Mrs. Spalding and myself over. Mr. McLeod gave me his and rode mine. The last branch we rode as much as half a mile in crossing and against the current, too, which made it hard for the horses, the water being up to their sides. Husband had considerable difficulty in crossing the cart. Both cart and

mules were turned upside down in the river and entangled in the harness. The mules would have been drowned but for a desperate struggle to get them ashore. Then after putting two of the strongest horses before the cart, and two men swimming behind to steady it, they succeeded in getting it across. I once thought that crossing streams would be the most dreaded part of the journey. I can now cross the most difficult stream without the least fear....

8. List and describe the troubles / problems faced by the travelers on their journey.

9. How did they solve the problems they faced?

10. Describe a time in your own life where you have moved from one place to another. (Write a paragraph describing your experience and including answers the following questions. You are welcome to use another piece of paper or your lap top.)

- **What were your fears / expectations? Did your destination meet your expectations?**
- **What challenges did you face along the way and/or when you finally reached your new destination?**
- **Compare and Contrast your journey with that of the pioneers in the 1800's.**

DIARIES AND JOURNALS OF NARCISSA WHITMAN 1836

PLATTE RIVER, JUST ABOVE THE FORKS, JUNE 3RD, 1836.

Dear Sister Harriet and Brother Edward: Friday eve, six o'clock. We have just encamped for the night near the bluffs over against the river. The bottoms are a soft, wet plain, and we were obliged to leave the river yesterday for the bluffs. The face of the country yesterday afternoon and today has been rolling sand bluffs, mostly barren, quite unlike what our eyes have been satiated with for weeks past. No timber nearer than the Platte, and the water tonight is very bad - got from a small ravine. We have usually had good water precious to this.

1. Describe the importance of water on this journey. (What are the uses of water?)

You need water for drinking, cooking, bathing, washing, hygiene, for animals, cooling off.

Water presents the following challenges: crossing rivers, disease in water, mud, mud slides, ice (any other details you can come up with can be added).

Our fuel for cooking since we left timber (no timber except on rivers) has been dried buffalo dung; we now find plenty of it and it answers a very good purpose, similar to the kind of coal used in Pennsylvania (I suppose now Harriet will make up a face at this, but if she was here she would be glad to have her supper cooked at any rate in this scarce timber country). The present time in our journey is a very important one. The hunter brought us buffalo meat yesterday for the first time. Buffalo were seen today but none have been taken. We have some for supper tonight. Husband is cooking it - no one of the company professes the art but himself. I expect it will be very good. Stop - I have so much to say to the children that I do not know in what part of my story to begin. I have very little time to write. I will first tell you what our company consists of. We are ten in number; five missionaries, three Indian boys and two young men employed to assist in packing animals.

2. What are the sources of fuel?

Coal (Pennsylvania); Wood along the rivers; buffalo dung

3. What people, animals and items make up the company of travelers?

There are 5 missionaries (including men and women), 3 American Indian boys, 2 young men (to help in packing the animals).

Saturday, 4th. I wish I could describe to you how we live so that you can realize it. Our manner of living is far preferable to any in the States. I never was so contented and happy before neither have I enjoyed such health for years. In the morning as soon as the day breaks the first that we hear is the words, "Arise! Arise!" --then the mules set up such a noise as you never heard, which puts the whole camp in motion. We encamp in a large ring, baggage and men, tents and wagons on the outside, and all the animals except the cows, which are fastened to pickets, within the circle. This arrangement is to accommodate the guard, who stand regularly every night and day, also when we are in motion, to protect our animals from the approach of Indians, who would steal them. As I said, the mules' noise brings every man on his feet to loose them and turn them out to feed.

4. Why do you think she said that she was happier and healthier than while she lived in the States?

Answers will vary. A possible answer might be: "Her day was no longer run by the business and demands of society. Life was dictated by the natural world around them. She felt a sense of adventure and freedom that she had not been afforded or allowed in the past. She did not have the same constraints put on her as a woman in 19th Century America, and was treated with greater equality—she was able to contribute to the survival of the company. As a result of this and the hard manual labor, she experienced an improved level of mental and physical health."

******These are my own thoughts and may not be historically correct.******

Now, H. and E., you must think it very hard to have to get up so early after sleeping on the soft ground, when you find it hard work to open your eyes at seven o'clock. Just think of me - every morning at the word, "Arise!" we all spring. While the horses are feeding we get breakfast in a hurry and eat it. By this time the words, "Catch up! Catch up," ring through the camp for moving. We are ready to start usually at six, travel till eleven, encamp, rest and feed, and start again about two; travel until six, or before, if we come to a good tavern, then encamp for the night. ...

5. Describe a typical day for the travelers. (What they did first, second, third, ...?)

1st: the company gets up very early and eats breakfast, while the animals are eating (probably between 4:30 and 5:30 am)

2nd: start traveling at six

3rd: stop at around 11 am

4th: rest and feed

5th: travel from 2 pm to 6 pm (or earlier if they arrive at a good tavern)

6th: encamp for the night

...Tell mother I am a very good housekeeper on the prairie. I wish she could just take a peep at us while we are sitting at our meals. Our table is the ground, our table-cloth is an India-rubber cloth used when it rains as a cloak; our dishes are made of tin-basins for teacups, iron spoons and plates, each of us, and several pans for milk and to put our meat in when we wish to set it on the table. Each one carries his own knife in his scabbard, and it is always ready to use. When the table things are spread, after making our own forks or sticks and helping ourselves to chairs, we gather around the table.... Let me assure you of this, we relish our food none the less for sitting on the ground while eating. We have tea and a plenty of milk, which is a luxury in this country. our milk has assisted us very much in making our bread since we have been journeying.... I never saw any thing like buffalo meat to satisfy hunger. We do not want any thing else with it. I have eaten three meals of it and it relishes well. Supper and breakfast we eat in our tent. We do not pitch it at noon. Have worship immediately after supper and breakfast....

6. List and describe the tools/items used to eat with at meal times.

The table is the ground; table cloth is made of Indian rubber (also used when it rains as a cloak); dishes are made of tin—basins for teacups, iron spoons and plates, and several pans for milk and meat. Each man carries his own knife. Forks made from wood (or sticks).

Supper and breakfast are eaten in their tent, but not at noon meal.

7. What are some of the foods that they ate?

Meat, milk (luxury), bread, buffalo meat

...25th. - Came fifteen miles to-day; encamped on Smith's creek, a small branch of Bear creek. The ride has been very mountainous - paths winding on the sides of steep mountains. In some places the path is so narrow as scarcely to afford room for the animal to place his foot. One after another we pass along with cautious step. Passed a creek on which was a fine bunch of gooseberries, nearly ripe.

Husband has had a tedious time with the wagon to-day. It got stuck in the creek this morning when crossing, and he was obliged to wade considerably in getting it out. After that, in going between the mountains, on the side of one, so steep that it was difficult for horses pass, the wagon was upset twice; did not wonder at this at all; it was a greater wonder that it was not turning somersaults continually. It is not very grateful to my feelings to see him wearing out with such excessive fatigue, as I am obliged to. He is not

as fleshy as he was last winter. All the most difficult part of the way he has walked, in laborious attempts to take the wagon. Ma knows what my feelings are....

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The river is divided by two islands into three branches, and is fordable. The packs are placed upon the tops of the highest horses and in this way we crossed without wetting. Two of the tallest horses were selected to carry Mrs. Spalding and myself over. Mr. McLeod gave me his and rode mine. The last branch we rode as much as half a mile in crossing and against the current, too, which made it hard for the horses, the water being up to their sides. Husband had considerable difficulty in crossing the cart. Both cart and mules were turned upside down in the river and entangled in the harness. The mules would have been drowned but for a desperate struggle to get them ashore. Then after putting two of the strongest horses before the cart, and two men swimming behind to steady it, they succeeded in getting it across. I once thought that crossing streams would be the most dreaded part of the journey. I can now cross the most difficult stream without the least fear....

8. List and describe the troubles / problems faced by the travelers on their journey.

Very mountainous with paths so narrow and steep that it was difficult for animals to place their feet

Wagon got stuck in the creek—had to wade in to dislodge it. Wagon flipped over at least a couple of times.

People are over-tired and have become much leaner.

Being misled / getting lost; crossing rivers with the horses, and crossing against the current of the river—hard for the horses; cart and mules were turned upside down in the water and entangled in the harness: desperate struggle to get mules ashore before they drowned. Getting the cart across the river took two of the strongest horses and two men swimming behind to steady the cart.

9. How did they solve the problems they faced?

They worked together to get the wagons across the rivers; they walked single file to make it safely through the mountain passes; they switched horses to get all the people and animals across the river safely.

Number 8 and 9 can be combined.

10. Describe a time in your own life where you have moved from one place to another. (Write a paragraph describing your experience and including answers the following questions. You are welcome to use another piece of paper or your lap top.)

- **What were your fears / expectations? Did your destination meet your expectations?**
- **What challenges did you face along the way and/or when you finally reached your new destination?**
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Answers will vary. If students have never moved or cannot remember when they moved, they should pretend that they are moving and answer the questions based on the hypothetical situation.

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Since we have been in the prairie we have done all our cooking. When we left Liberty we expected to take bread to last us part of the way, but could not get enough to carry us any distance. We found it awkward work to bake out of doors at first, but we have become so accustomed to it now we do it very easily.

Tell mother I am a very good housekeeper on the prairie. I wish she could just take a peep at us while we are sitting at our meals. Our table is the ground, our table-cloth is an India-rubber cloth used when it rains as a cloak; our dishes are made of tin-basins for teacups, iron spoons and plates, each of us, and several pans for milk and to put our meat in when we wish to set it on the table. Each one carries his own knife in his scabbard, and it is always ready to use. When the table things are spread, after making our own forks or sticks and helping ourselves to chairs, we gather around the table. Husband always provides my seat, and in a way that you would laugh to see. It is the fashion of all this country to imitate the Turks. Messrs. Dunbar and Allis have supped with us, and they do the same. We take a blanket and lay down by the table, and those whose joints will let them follow the fashion; others take out some of the baggage (I suppose you know that there is no stones in this country' not a stone have I seen of any size on the prairie). For my part I fix myself as gracefully as I can, sometimes on a blanket, sometimes on a box, just as it is convenient. Let me assure you of this, we relish our food none the less for sitting on the ground while eating. We have tea and a plenty of milk, which is a luxury in this country. our milk has assisted us very much in making our bread since we have been journeying. While the Fur Company has felt the want of food, our milk has been of great service to us; but it was considerable work for us to supply ten persons with bread three times a day. We are done using it now. What little flour we have left we shall preserve for thickening our broth, which is excellent. I never saw any thing like buffalo meat to satisfy hunger. We do not want any thing else with it. I have eaten three meals of it and it relishes well. Supper and breakfast we eat in our tent. We do not pitch it at noon. Have worship immediately after supper and breakfast.

July 18th. Under the protection of Mr. McLeod and his company we left the Rendezvous and came ten miles in a southwesterly direction. The Flatheads and some of the Snake Indians accompanied us a short distance. We make but one camp a day. One the 22nd we had a tedious ride, as we traveled till half-past four P.M. I thought of mother's bread, as a child would, but did not find it on the table, I should relish it extremely well; have been living on buffalo meat until I am cloyed with it. Have been in a peaceful state of mind all day. Had a freedom in prayer for my beloved parents; blessed privilege that such a sinner as I may have access to a mercy seat, through such a Saviour as Jesus Christ. It is good to feel that he is all I want, and all my righteousness; and if I had ten thousand lives I would give them all for him. I long to be more like him - to possess more of his meek spirit.

25th. - Came fifteen miles to-day; encamped on Smith's creek, a small branch of Bear creek. The ride has been very mountainous - paths winding on the sides of steep mountains. In some places the path is so narrow as scarcely to afford room for the animal to place his foot. One after another we pass along with cautious step. Passed a creek on which was a fine bunch of gooseberries, nearly ripe. Husband has had a tedious time with the wagon to-day. It got stuck in the creek this morning when crossing, and he was obliged to wade considerably in getting it out. After that, in going between the mountains, on the side of one, so steep that it was difficult for horses pass, the wagon was upset twice; did not wonder at this at all; it was a greater wonder that it was not turning somersaults continually. It is not very grateful to my feelings to see him wearing out with such excessive fatigue, as I am obliged to. He is not

as fleshy as he was last winter. All the most difficult part of the way he has walked, in laborious attempts to take the wagon. Ma knows what my feelings are.

26th. - Did not move camp today. Mr. McKay has been preparing to send out trappers from this place. Husband has been sick to-day, and so lame with the rheumatism as to be scarcely able to move. It is a great privilege that we can lie still to-day on his account, for he needs rest.

27th. - had quite a level route to-day - came down Bear river. Mr. McKay sent off about thirty of his men as trappers to-day. Several lodges of Indians also left us to go in another direction, and we expect more to leave us to-morrow. They wish to go a different route from Mr. McLeod, and desire us to go with them; but it would be more difficult and lengthy than Mr. McLeod's. We are still in a dangerous country; but our company is large enough for safety. Our cattle endure the journey remarkably well. They supply us with sufficient milk for our tea and coffee, which is indeed a luxury. We are obliged to shoe some of them because of sore feet. Have seen no buffalo since we left Rendezvous. Have had no game of any kind except a few messes of antelope, which an Indian gave us. We have plenty of dried buffalo meat, which we have purchased from the Indians - and dry it is for me. It appears so filthy! I can scarcely eat it; but it keeps us alive, and we ought to be thankful for it. We have had a few meals of fresh fish, also, which we relished well, and have the prospect of obtaining plenty in one or two weeks more. Have found no berries; neither have I found any of Ma's bread (Girls, do not waste the bread; if you knew how well I should relish even the driest morsel, you would save every piece carefully.) Do not think I regret coming. No, far from it; I would not go back for a world. I am contented and happy, notwithstanding I sometimes get very hungry and weary. Have six week's steady journey before us. Feel sometimes as if it were a long time to be traveling. Long for rest, but must not murmur.

Feel to pity the poor Indian women, who are continually traveling in this manner during their lives, and know no other comfort. They do all the work and are the complete slaves of their husbands. I am making some little progress in their language; long to be able to converse with them about the Saviour.

28th. - Very mountainous all the way to-day; came over another ridge; rode from 8 A.M. to 2 P.M. We thought yesterday the Indians were all going to leave us, except two or three; but not one has. They fear to, on account of the Blackfoot tribe, who would destroy them all, if they could. One of the axle-trees of the wagon broke to-day; was a little rejoiced, for we were in hopes they would leave it, and have no more trouble with it. Our rejoicing was in vain for they are making a cart of the back wheels, this afternoon, and lashing the fore wheels to it-intending to take it through in some shape or other. They are so resolute and untiring in their efforts they will probably succeed.

Had some fresh fish for breakfast and some antelope for supper, sent us by Mr. McLeod and other friends in camp. Thus the Lord provides, and smoothes all our ways for us, giving us strength.

Aug. 13th. - Saturday; We have come fifteen miles and have had the worst route in all the journey for the cart. We might have had a better one but for being misled by some of the company who started out before the leaders. It was two o'clock before we came into camp.

The river is divided by two islands into three branches, and is fordable. The packs are placed upon the tops of the highest horses and in this way we crossed without wetting.

Two of the tallest horses were selected to carry Mrs. Spalding and myself over. Mr. McLeod gave me his and rode mine. The last branch we rode as much as half a mile in crossing and against the current, too, which made it hard for the horses, the water being up to their sides. Husband had considerable difficulty in crossing the cart. Both cart and mules were turned upside down in the river and entangled in the harness. The mules would have been drowned but for a desperate struggle to get them ashore. Then after putting two of the strongest horses before the cart, and two men swimming behind to steady it, they succeeded in getting it across. I once thought that crossing streams would be the most dreaded part of the journey. I can now cross the most difficult stream without the least fear. There is one manner of crossing which husband has tried but I have not, neither do I wish to. Take an elk skin and stretch it over you, spreading yourself out as much as possible, then let the Indian women carefully put you on the water and with a cord in the mouth they will swim and draw you over. Edward, how do you think you would like to travel in this way?

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

Have students read through the selected excerpts from the Diary of Narcissa Whitman. Have them complete a written answer to each question that follows. Have the teacher lead a discussion based on what information the students were able to extract from the diaries. Ask students to list any questions that they might still have and discuss where they might go to look for the information to answer those questions. A possible follow up activity is to have the students research information that might help them answer their questions, and then present the information, along with their source, to the class.

A variation of this assignment is to work with students on each section as a whole class.

A variation of this assignment is to assign students in the group a few questions each and then have them discuss with each other what they found.

A variation of this assignment is to have different Diaries that students could compare to look at the same topic from a different perspective. Students might even look at related documents, other sources or artifacts to see if / how they contribute to the overall story / picture of Westward Expansion.

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

My assessment will be through their written answers and discussion.

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

- formulate historical questions based on primary and secondary sources, including documents, eyewitness accounts, letters and diaries, artifacts, real or simulated historical sites, charts, graphs, diagrams and written texts;**
- display empathy for people who have lived in the past; and**
- describe relationships between historical subject matter and other subjects they study, current issues and personal concerns.**