

Recommended Oregon Trail Books for Students An Annotated Bibliography

Annotations are intended to provide information for teachers to consider when selecting and using books with various kinds of students. These annotations describe what is and is not in the book, to help teachers choose books appropriate for the reading levels, as well as the family and cultural backgrounds of their students. Teachers may want to use particular books to bring out specific viewpoints on a topic or to provide a more holistic and honest portrayal of the overland journey.

Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie: The Oregon Trail Diary of Hattie Campbell-1847 by Kristina Gregory, c. 2005, ISBN #0-590-22651-7, Grades 4-7, Fiction. *Addresses the many hardships and difficulties of the Oregon Trail journey very honestly; good portrayal of the attitudes of the times and the feelings of the various characters. Balanced portrayal of encounters with Indians; good end notes add more context and information. Some students may find frank portrayal of death, suicide, quarreling among adults, violence, and cannibalism among survivors of the Donner party disturbing. The attitudes voiced by the characters portray those of the era and class discussion is needed to clarify how values and attitudes have changed since that time. Good for using in comparison to "In Pursuit of a Dream."*

Apples to Oregon by Deborah Hopkinson, c. 2003, ISBN #0689847676, Grades 1-3, Fiction, tall tale loosely based on real person. *Good map on inside covers, cute story, author's note about real family; includes apple facts; includes mention of singing and dancing.*

Daily Life in a Covered Wagon by Paul Erickson, c. 1997, ISBN #0-89132-245-6, Grades 4-7, Non-Fiction. *Wonderful illustrations, many are photos of real objects; follows a real family and includes diary quotes, shows all the aspects of life on the Trail; tells about different Indian tribes on the route, good map, timeline in back, also glossary, index and list of places to visit.*

Dandelions by Eve Bunting, c. 1995, ISBN #0-15-202407-7, Grades 2-3, Fiction. *Charming story about a little girl bringing her mother a present to their sod house in Nebraska. Mentions mother will have a new baby, saloons in the town, father circling mother's waist with his arm.*

Don't Know Much About the Pioneers by Kenneth C. Davis, c. 2003, ISBN #0-06-028617-2, Grades 3-5, Non-Fiction. *Question and answer format; good timeline; starts with the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark and the mountain men; contains many interesting facts and additional resources; good vocabulary; fairly balanced re Indian and pioneer encounters; good maps showing westward expansion of U.S.; acknowledges Oregon Trail routes as originally Indian paths; acknowledges contributions of Sacagawea and ex-slave Jim Beckworth;*

mentions Donner Party and Trail of Tears; quotes Meriwether Lewis- "civilized", "blazed trails" and "wilderness."

How I Survived the Oregon Trail: The Journal of Jesse Adams by Laura Wilson, c. 1999, 2010, ISBN #978-0756799250, Grades 3-6, Fiction. *Journal of an eleven-year-old boy crossing the Oregon Trail with his family, based on real diaries and letters. Illustrations are photos of real artifacts and replicas of equipment used on the overland journey. Many interesting sidebars such as how to make johnny cake or lye soap, directions for an Indian stick game, pictures of contemporary school books and guide books, etc. Excellent map in back, plus a simple index and bibliography and an afterward about the family's life after they reached Oregon.*

If You Traveled West in a Covered Wagon by Ellen Levine, c. 1986, ISBN #0-590-45158-8, Grades 2-4, Non-Fiction. *Nice map; only about going to Oregon; California is mentioned briefly; page numbers are at far top right of page, a little hard to find; light treatment of controversial topics such as birth and death and Indian encounters. Uses the term "new land." A good book to use to compare to the OCTA film "In Pursuit of a Dream."*

I'm Sorry, Almira Ann by Jane Kurtz, c. 1999, ISBN #978-0439206457, Grades 2-4, Fiction. *Good map in front; simple sketch illustrations; story of two girls who are friends traveling the Oregon Trail together with their families; one girl's wild play causes the other girl to be injured; the girl must find a way to make amends to her friend; good author's note at the end; all the things in the book are real incidents that happened on the Oregon Trail.*

The Journal of Douglas Allen Deeds: The Donner Party Expedition by Rodman Philbrick, c. 2001, ISBN #0-439-21600-1, Grades 4-7, Fiction. *Good illustrations, rich vocabulary and use of idioms; good fold-out map; fair treatment of Indian encounters; scalping, church, whisky, domestic abuse, the Bible and prayer, a shooting, birth and death, and funerals are all mentioned. The words "whisky" and "d_mn fool" are used more than once; the main character is offered liquor and refuses; does not go into detail about cannibalism.*

My First Little House Books: Prairie Day by Laura Ingalls Wilder (adaption), ISBN #0-06-443504-0, Grades K-2, Fiction, based on author's life. *Picture book; charming illustrations.*

The Oregon Trail (True Book) by Mel Friedman, c. 2010, ISBN #973-0531212479, Grades 3-5, Non-Fiction. *Starts with two questions for readers to find answers to in the book. A good first reference book with Table of Contents, Chapter Headings, index, more resources and places to visit at end; many interesting illustrations, though some are too small; covers all main Oregon Trail topics in very simplified form; acknowledges contributions of Native Americans and African-American mountain men. Better for younger grades or students needing adapted curriculum.*

Rachel's Journal by Marissa Moss, c. 2001, ISBN #0-439-09870-X, Grades 3-4, Fiction, based on real Trail diaries. *Good map on inside cover; good for comparison to "In Pursuit of a Dream; clearly portrays the difficulties of the overland journey; Indian encounters are portrayed as friendly; mentions the Bible and the Donner Party; uses the word "piss" on p. 2; mentions a boy dressing as a girl and a girl dressing as a boy; p. 13 boy is revived with whisky; p. 19 whisky administered for pain of a broken leg.*

Red Flower Goes West by Ann Turner, c. 1999, ISBN #0-7868-0313-4, Grades K-3, Fiction. *Beautiful illustrations of the story of a family going to California for gold; the mother insists on taking a red flower from her garden on the journey; the children come to feel that if the flower survives they will reach California safely.*

Roughing It on the Oregon Trail by Diane Stanley, c. 2001, ISBN #0-06-449006-8, Grades 2-4, Fiction. *Two children time travel with their grandma; good illustrations, excellent then and now maps; author's notes about Indians are thorough; mentions scalps and sister soiling herself.*

The Stout-Hearted Seven: Orphaned on the Oregon Trail by Neta Lohnes Frazier, c. 2006, ISBN #978-1-4027-3617-9, Grades 4-7, Non-Fiction. *True story of the seven Sager children who were orphaned in the middle of their overland journey to Oregon, all less than 14 years old. The other members of their wagon train took care of them and took them to the Whitman Mission near present day Walla Walla, Washington, where they were adopted by missionaries Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, only to be present at the Indian attack on the mission three years later. Based on memoirs of some of the Sager children and the author's interviews with descendants.*

The Water Seeker by Kimberly Willis Holt, c. 2009, ISBN #978-0805080209, Grades 6-8, Fiction. *Teen novel follows the life journey of a motherless boy born in Missouri, the son of a dowser, through his journey over the Oregon-Trail via the Barlow Road in 1848. The story is more about the journey of life than the physical journey and gives a good portrayal of the human interactions within the boy's extended family and within the wagon train. The hardships and landmarks of the Oregon Trail are part of the story without excessive gruesome details. The characters are well drawn and natural and show the many different kinds of people who took the overland trail to Oregon. The journey brings out their individual strengths and weaknesses. The last chapter tells what happened to the main characters after they reached Oregon. Good map inside front cover.*

The Way West, Journal of a Pioneer Woman by Amelia Stewart Knight, c. 1993, ISBN #0-671-72375-8, Grades 3-5, Non-Fiction. *Diary excerpts with strong illustrations added; a pioneer woman, her husband and seven children make it safely to Oregon with several near misses; good descriptions of river crossings,*

traversing the mountains, illnesses, accidents and storms encountered along the way. Mrs. Knight delivered her eighth child within days of arriving in Oregon.

West Along the Wagon Road, American Sisters 1852 by Laurie Lawlor, c. 1998, ISBN #978-0613824583, Grades 4-6, Fiction, based on a true story. *The adventures of six Scott sisters and their brothers over the Oregon Trail in 1852. Shows the hardships of the journey without gruesome details. Told from the perspective of a misunderstood middle sister who wonders why girls "don't seem to count." The Scott sisters grew up to be well-known supporters of women's rights in Oregon; the most famous being Abigail Scott Duniway; their brother was the owner of "The Oregonian" newspaper. The author provides an afterward that tells what happened to each family member and an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources.*

Westward to Home: Joshua's Diary, The Oregon Trail 1848 by Patricia Hermes, c. 2001, ISBN #0-439-11209-5, Grades 3-5, Fiction. *Good for comparison to "In Pursuit of a Dream"; good portrayal of main character's feelings; viewpoint is sexist and anti-Indian in keeping with the times; comments on too many babies being born, infighting in the wagon train, death, Indians as thieves, Indians violating graves; historical note at the end is dismissive of Indian viewpoint.*

You Wouldn't Want to be an American Pioneer! by Jacqueline Morley, c. 2002, ISBN #0-439-40897-0, Grades 2-4, Non-Fiction. *Humorous illustrations. Written by British author.*

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