

Nutrition Along The Oregon Trail

Summary

By understanding how nutrition effects physical and mental wellness, and through tracing the history of the United States through the Oregon Trail which led to western expansion, students have an opportunity to understand the physical and mental difficulties faced by those who traveled along the Oregon Trail, and relate how following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans may impact the health of individuals as well as communities.

Main Core Tie

Health Education - 5th Grade

[Strand 5: NUTRITION \(N\) Standard 5.N.2:](#)

Time Frame

1 class periods of 30 minutes each

Group Size

Individual

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Social & Civic Responsibility, Employability

Materials

- Map of Oregon Trail
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans
- Saltines
- Refried beans (can)
- Plastic knife
- Basic supply list for Oregon Trail travelers

Background for Teachers

Download a copy of a 'Basic Supply List' also below.

Download Dietary Guidelines for Americans listed below.

Student Prior Knowledge

The students should have a basic understanding that there was western expansion of the United States through the 19th century. As part of this expansion process, there were trails that most of the people going west traveled on. One of the main trails is called The Oregon Trail.

Instructional Procedures

STEP ONE: DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS

Review the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, found in the attachments section of this lesson. Ask the students to give reasons why we have such guidelines in America. List reasons on the board.

Discuss how not following the Dietary guidelines for Americans may impact the health of individuals. (See Health Education Standard 6 Objective 1 - obesity, heart disease, and cancer are listed there.)

Then discuss how not following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans may impact the communities. (See Health Education Standard 6 Objective 1 - insurance rates and missed work or school days are

listed there.)

STEP TWO: WESTERN EXPANSION

Display a map of the United States. Explain that the class will discuss the nutrition of people in history who were part of the western expansion of the United States during the nineteenth century.

Write 'Western Expansion - 19th century' on the board. Ask the students to list the reasons why people at the beginning of the 19th century wanted to head west. List the answers on the board. (See Social Studies Standard 6050-0201-6.)

Show a map of the Oregon Trail. The mileage from Independence, Missouri (the beginning of the trail) to the end of the trail in Oregon is approximately 2000 miles.

Ask the students to guess how long it took a person to get from Independence, Missouri to Oregon City. After several guesses, tell the class that the average miles traveled per day was about 15 miles. It took a traveler around 133 days, or about four and a half months, to travel the distance of the Oregon Trail.

STEP THREE: BASIC SUPPLIES

Ask the students to list some of the supplies they think a traveler in the nineteenth century would need on the Oregon Trail. List the students' ideas on the board. Share the Basic Supply List.

Compare the students' responses with the list.

STEP FOUR:

Compare the basic supply list to the dietary guidelines for Americans. Ask the students to tell if the basic supply list would provide the proper nutrition for the travelers. Why or why not?

How would their diet effect their physical and mental wellness? How did the 'settlers', 'pioneers', 'travelers', 'explorers' stay healthy as they traveled? How did they supplement their diets as they traveled? (Wild game, foraging long the trail, trading, etc.)

STEP FIVE:

Ask the students to think of some meals the travelers may have created from their supplies. The flour and salt could have been made into something like crackers. The beans could have been cooked, spiced, then mashed to make a paste-like substance, something like refried beans.

Share a cracker with a little refried beans (served room temperature straight from the can) spread on the cracker. Ask the students if they think they would have liked this sort of meal. Ask the students to think of other ways flour and beans could have been served on the trail.

Extensions

Using the Basic Supply List, divide each food item by the amount of days calculated for the trip to determine the daily ration.

Tie in the curriculum of Social Studies Standard 6050-08-01 of experiencing the culture of Mexico by talking about other ways to serve refried beans. Invite someone from Mexico to share the food culture.

Using the 6+1 Traits of Writing, have the students write as if they are writing a journal entry in the 19th century as they traveled along the Oregon Trail. The students are to include information about the available nutritional value of their diet.

Have a guest speaker talk about hiking by foot so many mile per day and how that physical exertion affected their appetite, what they ate, etc.

Provide statistics about the illnesses and deaths of those who traveled along the Oregon Trail in the nineteenth century.

Assessment Plan

Using the 6+1 Traits of Writing, have the students write as if they were a 19th century traveler along the Oregon Trail making a journal entry, incorporating thoughts about nutrition and how it impacts the health of individuals and communities.

Rubrics

[Nutrition Along The Oregon Trail](#)

Bibliography

- www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines

Authors

[Val Murdock](#)

[Mary Jane Page](#)