

Open Up the Textbook (OUT)

Enlarge

Complicate

Contest

Vivify

Title: Wagon Trains and the Forty-Mile Desert

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Standards: (Reading for Informational Text: RI 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9) & (Social Studies: H1.4.4, H2.4.2, H2.4.4, G5.4.2)

In this OUT analysis, 4th grade students will study dangers faced by people traveling on the trail west. This OUT analysis provides students with documents that are meant to deliberately complicate and vivify the textbook.

This strategy is implemented most effectively when students collaborate to analyze the texts in small, heterogeneous groups. The texts that accompany the textbook are complex and often include difficult vocabulary and syntax. (For a few words that are likely unknown to students and unidentifiable based upon context clues, helpful synonyms are provided in the footnotes.) Students should first annotate each text and then collaborate to answer the text dependent and specific questions that follow. Questions will highlight sourcing and perspective of the author, close reading of key details from the document that enlarge, complicate, contest, or vivify the textbook, as well as questions that help students corroborate (or not) the accuracy of individual documents. The culminating task that follows, provides students an opportunity to share their knowledge about the topic by choosing a writing assignment. They will employ evidence from multiple sources to justify their analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Source A: The Textbook – *Nevada: Our Home*, G.P. BeDunnah et al., pages 87-88

Dangers on the Trail

Moving west was an exciting adventure, but it was also very hard. Every day there were problems and dangers to face. Week after week, pioneers walked in the dust and heat. When it rained, wagon wheels were often stuck in the mud. Many pioneers died along the trail because of freezing temperatures and deep snows.

Weather was just one of the many problems people faced during their travels west. Some got lost because the trails they followed were not marked. Others drifted off course while trying to follow maps made by early explorers or traders. Pioneers also had to protect themselves from bear, mountain lion, or other wild animal attacks.

Another problem people faced was unfriendly Indian tribes. Most tribes were friendly at first. They traded with the pioneers for goods, food, and other supplies. But as more wagon trains came west, some Indians began to attack the settlers. They wanted to stop the settlers from harming the land and the animals the tribes depended on for food.

Indian tribes and pioneers lived very different lives. Their ways of life did not always work well together. Indian tribes believed their way of life was in danger.

Source B: Primary source, journal entries

Journal Entry #1 Source: http://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC2EP93_40-mile-desert-carson-river-route?guid=0a96bbff-151a-475e-bf97-81f16c549dc5

Eleazar Stillman Ingalls - Imagine to yourself a vast plain of sand and clay; ...the stunted sage, the salt lakes, cheating the thirsty traveler into the belief that water is near; yes, water it is, but poison to the living thing that stops to drink.... Burning wagons render still more hideous the solemn march; dead horses line the road, and living ones may be constantly seen, lapping and rolling the empty water casks (which have been cast away) for a drop of water to quench their burning thirst, or standing with drooping heads, waiting for death to relieve them of their tortures, or lying on the sand half buried, unable to rise, yet still trying. The sand hills are reached; then comes a scene of confusion and dismay. Animal after animal drops down. Wagon after wagon is stopped, the strongest animals are taken out of the harness; the most important effects are taken out of the wagon and placed on their backs and all hurry away, leaving behind wagons, property and animals that, too weak to travel, lie and broil in the sun.... The owners hurry on with but one object in view, that of reaching the Carson River before the boiling sun shall reduce them to the same condition.... The desert! You must see it and feel it in an August day, when legions¹ have crossed it before you, to realize it in all its horrors. But heaven save you from the experience.

Source B Questions for Consideration

1. What do you think the author meant: "The desert. You must see it and feel it on an August day, when legions have crossed it before you, to realize it in all its horrors?"

2. What can you infer about the author's perspective of traveling through the Forty-mile Desert?

¹ A great number of people

Source C: Primary Source, newspaper – “Distressing News”, California Star Newspaper, February 13, 1847

*Distressing*² news by Captain J.A. Sutter’s launch which arrived here a few days since from Fort Sacramento- we received a letter from a friend at that place, containing a most distressing account of the situation of the emigrants in the mountains, who were prevented from crossing them by the snow-and of a party of eleven who attempted to come into the valley on foot.

The following *particulars*³ we extracted from the letter by J.A. Sutter: The Company is composed of twenty-three wagons, and is a part of Col. Russell’s company, that left the *rendezvous*⁴ on Indian Creek near The Missouri line on the 13th day of May last. They arrived at Fort Bridger in good time, some two weeks earlier than the last company on the road. From that point they took the new road by the south end of the Great Salt Lake, which was then being marked out by some seventy five wagons with Messrs. Hastings and Headspath as pilots.

They followed on in the wagon train until they were near the “Weber River canion,” and within some 4 or 5 days travel of the leading wagons, when they stopped and sent on three men to request Mr. Hastings to go back and show them the pack trail from the Red Fork of Weber River to the Lake. Mr. Hastings went back and showed them the trail, and then returned to our company, all of which time we remained in camp waiting for Mr. Hastings to show us the rout.

They then commenced making the new road over the Lake on the pack trail, so as to avoid the Weber River canion, and Mr. Reed and others, who left the company, and came in for *assistance*,⁵ informed me that they were 16 days making the road. Had they gone on the road that we had made for them, they would have easily *overtaken*⁶ us before we reached Old Mary’s River. They were travelling slow, on account of having to make an entire new rout for several hundred miles through heavy sage and over mountains. Had they gone around the old road, the north end of the Great Salt Lake, they would have been in the settlement in the first of September instead of October.

After crossing the long drive of 75 miles without water or grass, and suffering much from their loss of oxen, they sent two men to Sutter’s fort for mules and food supplies. Mr. Reed was also sent ahead to Sutter’s and arrived exhausted from starvation. He returned as far as Bear River valley and found snow so deep, that he could not get to the company. He *cached*⁷ the provisions there and returned.

We heard nothing of the company, until last week, when a messenger was sent down from Captain William Johnson’s settlement, with astounding information that five women and two men had arrived at that point entirely naked, their feet frost bitten- and informed them that the company arrived within three miles of the small log cabin near Trucky’s Lake on the east side of the mountains, and found the snow so deep that they could not travel, fearing starvation.

² distressing-to cause great pain or sorrow; anxiety; trouble

³ particulars-belonging to an individual part; item; point

⁴ Rendezvous-meeting or gathering place

⁵ assistance-help, aid

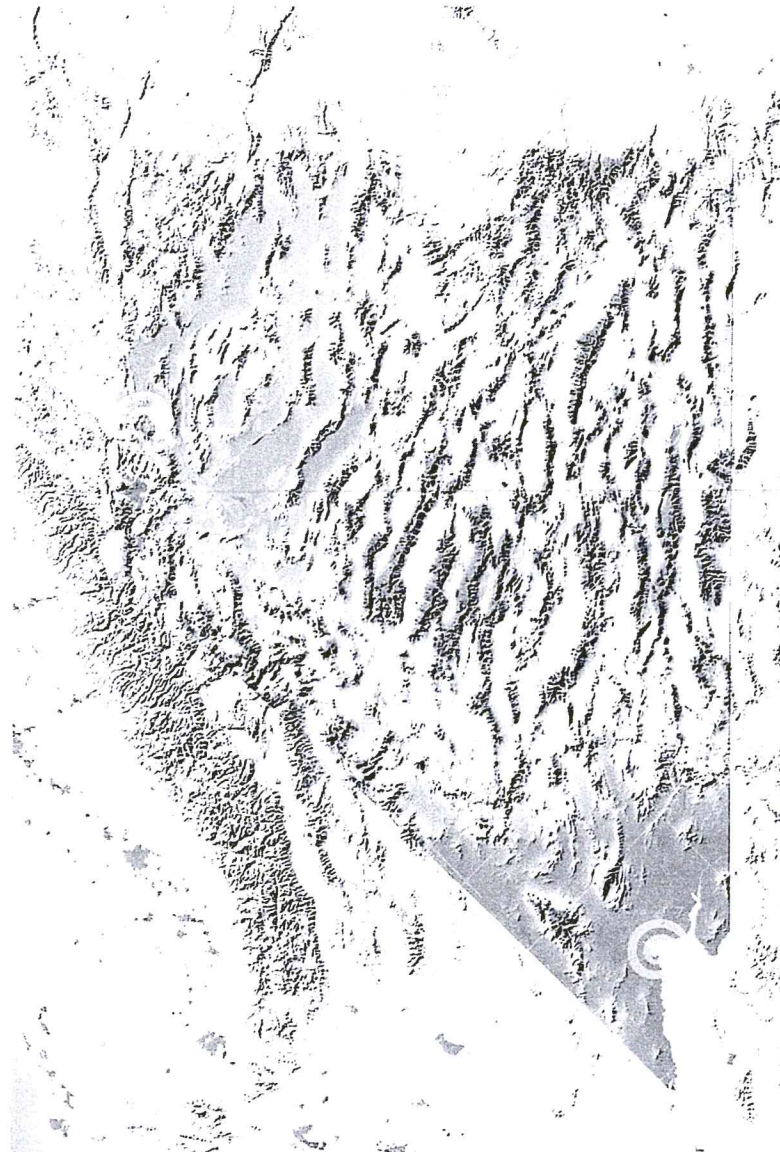
⁶ overtaken-come upon suddenly

⁷ cached-hiding place for food or other things

Source C Questions for Consideration

1. Why do you think the author used the word “distressing” to introduce this article? What is the “distressing news”?
2. What can you infer the people reading the article were thinking or feeling? Cite examples as evidence for your support.
3. The article mentioned several complications that arose during the trip. Discuss some of those complications.

Source D: Secondary Source, Map



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Source D Questions for Consideration

1. Using the map on page 93 of Nevada, Our Home as a guide, draw in the 40 Mile Desert on the map above.
2.
 - a. What features do you see on the map above?
 - b. What does this help you understand about Nevada?
 - c. How might these features make traveling by wagon trains difficult or dangerous for settlers?
 - d. What features in the topography would aid the settlers as they traveled across Nevada?
3. On the map above, trace what you consider to be the best travel route from East to West. Explain why you chose that route.

(Teacher note – you may want to add current cities, towns, features to compare to this).

Source E: Primary Source, photograph

Please access the “Wagon Train Zoom In” lesson under 4th grade resources at:
www.projecttahoe.org

Student Writing Task

Standards: Writing: It will depend on which job they choose. Their culminating activity can be persuasive, informative or narrative. All writing will include W.4.4, 7, 8, and 9. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the texts as well as the ways in which the textbook was complicated and vivified.

Teacher note: Students choose one culminating activity to demonstrate their knowledge of the texts.

1. You are a settler who has just completed the journey west. Write a letter to a friend or family member back home, persuading them to either take or not take the journey west. Your letter must include 3-5 pieces of evidence from 2-3 of the sources provided that supports your opinion why they should or should not take the journey.
2. Make a warning poster that demonstrates the problems with choosing to journey west. Your poster should include examples from the texts with pictorial support.
3. Create a 1-2 minutes newscast about your experiences traveling west across the Forty-mile Desert. (Standards: SL3, SL4, SL5, W.4.6)