

Pioneers in the Wilderness

Assign each group member to one of the following roles:

Father:

Mother:

Teenage daughter:

Young son:

Grandfather:

Grandmother:

Read this passage aloud in your groups:

You are a pioneer family from Philadelphia. The year is 1843 and you have decided to immigrate in a Conestoga covered wagon to the Oregon Territory. In Philadelphia there is little opportunity for a person to acquire land. But in the Oregon Territory, land is yours for the settling. The government is encouraging you to go. For the price of the move and a few years hard work, each family member can claim 160 acres of land. However, the journey is 4-6 months of travel by wagon, half of which will be done in the winter. You will arrive in June of 1843. Winters in that part of Oregon have significant rainfall and occasional snow. Temperatures are generally mild and livestock can survive without shelter.

The frontier land is covered with dense deciduous and coniferous forests. Wildlife abounds, including bear, deer, bobcat, quail, grouse, passenger pigeon, wolf, cougar and salmon. There is a resident population of Indians, but the settlers have had little contact with them.

You have brought with you vegetable and grain seeds, a few hand tools, and a plow. Your livestock consists of only a milk cow, two pigs, two sheep, a horse, two oxen (to pull the wagon), and 10 chickens. In whatever room is left, you bring a few prize possessions.

As a family, you must now have a discussion about the things you have to do to establish a home in the Oregon wilderness. (Discuss the five items listed on right side of this page.)

1. Make a list of things that must be done in your first year.
2. Arrange the items in your list in the order in which they must be accomplished.
3. Who will do what?
4. Evaluate your list to make sure it's realistic in terms of season and weather.
5. Discuss and make a second list describing the environmental impact each activity will have.