

Historical Texts

1 GETTING THE IDEA

A **historical text** tells about real events, real people, or real places from long ago. Historical texts can tell:

- how people lived.
- when and where events took place.
- where places were and what they looked like.
- how the past and the present connect.

The purpose of a historical text may be to inform or persuade readers. When the purpose is to inform, most authors present the facts and details without sharing their point of view. When the purpose is to persuade, authors try to encourage readers to think a certain way or to do something.

Types of Historical Texts

Different types of historical texts give different information. Read the chart below.

Historical Text	Definition
speech	a spoken opinion or report about a topic
document	an official paper, such as a law or an agreement
nonfiction book	a text that gives facts and details about a topic or event
biography	a book that tells the true story of a person's life

Main Idea and Details

Like other nonfiction texts, the **main idea** of a historical text is what the text is mostly about. **Supporting details** give important information about the main idea. They help readers understand the main idea by backing it up with evidence.

Read this paragraph. Circle the main idea and underline the supporting details.

Neil Armstrong’s love of flight began with an airplane ride when he was six. From then on, he wanted to fly higher and faster. He flew model airplanes and learned to fly a real plane before he could drive a car. As an adult, Armstrong was a Navy pilot, an airplane designer, and an astronaut. He flew his highest and fastest on a trip to the moon. On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon.

Text Structure

Text structure is how a text is organized. The most common structures in historical texts are cause-and-effect and sequence.

A **cause-and-effect** structure explains why different things happen. It shows how events are connected. A **cause** is the event that happens first. The **effect** is what happens as a result of the cause. Authors use signal words to show cause and effect. These include *because, for this reason, due to, and as a result*.

Read these sentences. Underline the cause and circle the effect. Draw a box around cause-and-effect signal words.

The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776. As a result, we celebrate Independence Day every year on the fourth of July.

A **sequence** structure tells events in order. Dates and time-order words help identify the sequence of events. Time-order words include *first, then, before, after, and finally*.

Circle the words that show sequence in this paragraph.

On January 24, 1848, gold was discovered in California. At first, the discovery was a secret. Then, a newspaper printed a story about the gold. Soon many people were traveling to California to look for gold. By the end of 1849, the number of settlers living in California had grown from 1,000 to 100,000.

Graphic Features

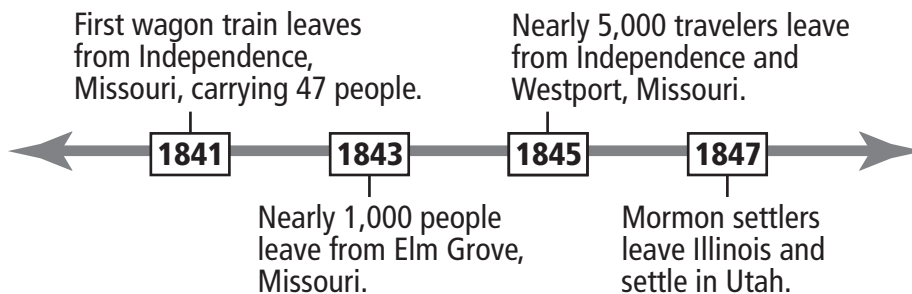
Graphic features, such as charts and diagrams, are visual aids that help explain the text or give extra information. Here are some examples of graphic features in historical texts.

- A **map** is a drawing that shows where places or things are located.



- A **timeline** shows when events happened. The dates and events are shown in time order along a line or bar.

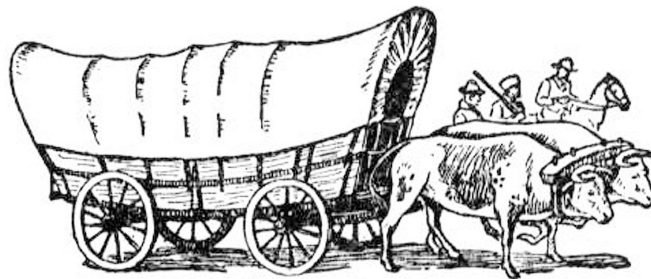
Oregon Trail Events



- A **photograph** is a picture that shows an event as it really happened. This photograph shows President Theodore Roosevelt making a speech many years ago.



- An **illustration** is a drawing that shows what something looks like. A **caption** gives more information about it.



Covered wagon pulled by oxen

Language Spotlight • Domain-Specific Vocabulary

In historical texts, you may see **domain-specific vocabulary**, or words that relate to a certain topic. These words may be unfamiliar because they are not used in everyday language. Context clues, a glossary, or a dictionary can help you learn what the words mean. Read the paragraph. Circle the words that name Native American homes.

Native Americans built many different kinds of homes. Some lived in dome-shaped wigwams covered with sheets of tree bark. Several Iroquois families could live in one longhouse, which looked like a long, wide wigwam. The Plains Indians lived in tentlike structures called tepees.

Read the passage.

Wagons West

In the 1830s and 1840s, most Americans lived on the East Coast. It was the only settled part of our country. As a result, the area was crowded. Land was hard to find.

Many traders, though, had been out west. They returned with exciting stories. The Oregon Territory had plenty of open land. It had great soil for crops. This news excited many people. Some Americans wanted a new opportunity. Adventurers wanted excitement. So, thousands of families decided to move west. They packed up their belongings and traveled along the Oregon Trail, a two thousand-mile route between Missouri and the Oregon Valley.



The pioneers began their trip in early spring. These first settlers wanted to reach Oregon before winter. But they had to wait for grass to grow. The animals needed the grass to eat along the trail. Most people left from Independence, Missouri. Others joined from smaller towns along the way.

The trip was difficult. The only way to go was by wagon train, which was a group of wagons pulled by horses, mules, or oxen. Each wagon could hold about five people. A trip could last five months.

Moving west was a big decision because it cost so much money. Families spent around \$1,000 for their food supply and wagon. This was a huge amount of money for families long ago, when people usually earned only a few dollars each week.

Families took as many supplies and household goods as their animals could pull. But the wagons could hold only so much. Therefore, many people had to sell or leave some things behind. Selling some of what they had, though, helped to pay for the trip.

Getting ready was key. There was not much to buy or trade along the route. So, supplies for the entire trip had to be carried in the wagon train. Travelers had to bring all of their food, such as flour, coffee, and salt. They brought all their tools for cooking and eating. They packed all of their bedding, towels, clothing, and shoes. They packed seeds and farming tools to grow crops. They brought weapons for protection and hunting.

Whatever the reason people made the trip west, it took planning and courage. Following the Oregon Trail was hard. The pioneers who braved it changed both their own lives and America.

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Read the statement from the passage.

But the wagons could only hold only so much.

Which of the following sentences gives an effect of this situation?

- A. Land was hard to find.
- B. So, thousands of families decided to move west.
- C. A trip could last five months.
- D. Therefore, many people had to sell or leave some things behind.

Hint Remember that an effect happens as the result of something.

- 2 Read the paragraph from the passage.

The pioneers began their trip in early spring. These first settlers wanted to reach Oregon before winter. But they had to wait for grass to grow. The animals needed the grass to eat along the trail. Most people left from Independence, Missouri. Others joined from smaller towns along the way.

Which words in the paragraph explain the meaning of the word pioneers?

- A. first settlers
- B. before winter
- C. others joined
- D. smaller towns

Hint Look for clues that refer to the pioneers to help you figure out the meaning.

- 3 What information does the map help you locate?
- A. which city had the largest population in the 1840s
 - B. how many miles were in the Oregon Trail
 - C. which towns the Oregon Trail passed through
 - D. what a wagon train looked like

Hint Look back at the map. How can you use the labels on the map to add to your understanding of the topic?

- 4 This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two.

Part One

What is a main idea of “Wagons West”?

- A. Most Americans in the mid-1800s lived on the East Coast.
- B. Families had to prepare for their journey on the Oregon Trail.
- C. Horses, mules, and oxen were used to pull wagons.
- D. Pioneers had a hard time settling a new area.

Part Two

Which details from the text support the answer in Part One? Choose **two** answers.

- A. Each wagon could hold about five people.
- B. Travelers had to bring all of their food, such as flour, coffee, and salt.
- C. . . . people usually earned only a few dollars each week.
- D. But the wagons could only hold so much.
- E. They packed seeds and farming tools to grow crops.

Hint Think about an important idea in the text. Then, look for facts that tell about that idea.

Use the Reading Guide to help you understand the passage.

Children on the Oregon Trail

Reading Guide

What is this passage mostly about? Look for sentences that give you clues to the main idea.

The main idea of paragraph 3 is not the first sentence of the paragraph. Which sentence is it?

Why did children collect buffalo chips? Look for the cause of this event.

How does the illustration help you better understand the text?

In 1851, Martha Gay Masterson left her home in Springfield, Missouri. She was sad and scared to leave. At the age of thirteen, she faced a long journey. Her family was starting on the Oregon Trail.

Like Martha, most children who made the trip west were sad. Their move was permanent. They would probably never again see the friends and family they left behind.

What was it like for children on the Oregon Trail? It was a trip of both challenges and thrills. Storms and high winds blew across the land. Children slept on the ground, sometimes without a tent. They were often hungry and tired. Because their wagon was full, they walked most of the trip. That meant that even young children would walk about fifteen miles each day.

Children also had many chores to do. The long day started around 4:00 a.m. If the family had cows, children would herd and milk them. Then, they would gather wood or fetch water. If there was no wood, children collected buffalo chips to burn instead. Buffalo chips are dried buffalo waste. After children did their own chores, they helped their mothers cook and wash.



Reading Guide

Which details tell that the trip was dangerous?

Which details tell about the pleasant parts of the trip?

Why were children ready to start their lives in Oregon? Identify the cause and effect in the last paragraph.

Life on the trail could be more than hard. It could be dangerous. Many people did not survive. Disease and accidents were the biggest risks. They claimed the lives of both children and adults. Brothers, sisters, and mothers sometimes drowned while crossing rivers. Children could fall under the wheels of a moving wagon.

The journey west was not all suffering, though. There were adventures, too. Pioneers crossed miles of beautiful, open grasslands. Millions of grazing buffalo covered the land. Children explored hot springs, waterfalls, and other natural features. They picked wildflowers, danced around campfires, and met Native Americans.

Children on the Oregon Trail were probably happy that there was no school. They did have time, though, for learning. Families had brought books along, so children could read nearly every day. Younger children were taught to read. Mothers helped their children with math and history. Many children wrote about their adventures in journals.

Children found ways to have fun. They created new games using buffalo chips. Telling rhymes, riddles, or jokes helped pass the time. Music did, too. Families sang hymns, ballads, and rounds. They played musical instruments such as fiddles and flutes that they had packed in the wagons.

When children reached the end of the Oregon Trail, they were about five months older. They were dirty and tired. The hard trip forced them to grow up fast. Now they were ready to start their new lives in the Oregon Territory.

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Read this paragraph from “Children on the Oregon Trail.”

Children also had many chores to do. The long day started around 4:00 a.m. If the family had cows, children would herd and milk them. Then, they would gather wood or fetch water. If there was no wood, children collected buffalo chips to burn instead. Buffalo chips are dried buffalo waste. After children did their own chores, they helped their mothers cook and wash.

What text structure organizes the paragraph?

- A. sequence
 - B. cause and effect
 - C. problem and solution
 - D. compare and contrast
- 2 Read the statement from the passage.

Like Martha, most children who made the trip west were sad. Their move was permanent. They would probably never again see the friends and family they left behind.

Which phrase from the paragraph helps you understand the meaning of the word permanent?

- A. the trip west
- B. were sad
- C. their move
- D. never again

- 3 Read these sentences from the text.

Life on the trail could be more than hard. It could be dangerous. Many people did not survive. Disease and accidents were the biggest risks. They claimed the lives of both children and adults.

Which statement describes how the sentences are organized?

- A. The sentences describe a sequence of events.
 - B. The sentences tell how two events are different.
 - C. The sentences describe a problem and a solution.
 - D. The sentences explain a cause and effect.
- 4 This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two.

Part One

Which sentence **best** tells the main idea of “Children on the Oregon Trail”?

- A. Her family was starting on the Oregon Trail.
- B. Like Martha, most children who made the trip west were sad.
- C. It was a trip of both challenges and thrills.
- D. That meant that even young children would walk about fifteen miles each day.

Part Two

Which sentences from the text support the answer in Part One? Choose **two** answers.

- A. In 1851, Martha Gay Masterson left her home in Springfield, Missouri.
- B. What was it like for children on the Oregon Trail?
- C. Children slept on the ground, sometimes without a tent.
- D. Buffalo chips are dried buffalo waste.
- E. They picked wildflowers, danced around campfires, and met Native Americans.

- 5 This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two.

Part One

Which of the following statements is supported by information in the passage?

- A. Children on the Oregon Trail spent time working, learning, and having fun.
- B. Parents were too busy working to teach their children school subjects.
- C. Children spent time in school while their parents completed all the chores.
- D. During the journey, children did not have time for playing games.

Part Two

Which details from the passage support the answer in Part One? Choose **two** answers.

- A. They were often hungry and tired.
- B. Families had brought books along, so children could read nearly every day.
- C. Telling rhymes, riddles, or jokes helped pass the time.
- D. Pioneers crossed miles of beautiful, open grasslands.
- E. When children reached the end of the Oregon Trail, they were about five months older.

