

Using "Forgotten Journey" in your classroom...

Here are some ways to **inspire students to think** about the circumstances that the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party found themselves in, understand the historical context of the times in which they lived, and consider how decision-making and leadership affected the positive outcome of their journey.

Follow-up activities will extend students' understanding of this true story of the opening of the overland trail to California. To encourage students to find out more from books and other websites, look for **other resources**.

There are many ways that the **National Standards in History** can be applied when viewing and discussing the video, "Forgotten Journey." Discussion questions and activities are designed with these five dimensions of historical thinking in mind:

- 1) Chronological Thinking
- 2) Historical Comprehension
- 3) Historical Analysis and Interpretation
- 4) Historical Research Capabilities
- 5) Historical Issues -- Analysis and Decision-making

For more information on these standards, go to www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/thinking5-12.html

Think and Discuss

View a segment of the video, then pose these questions:

Council Bluffs - The Gathering Reasons for leaving home...

- Each of these families were drawn to California by the promise of good farmland. What were some of the additional reasons that the Murphy family decided to go to Alta California? (They liked the idea of settling in a place in which Catholics were welcomed. They also wanted to escape malaria, which had taken the lives of family members.)
- What were some of the reasons Dr. Townsend also decided to make the journey? (He expected new and prosperous business opportunities, and thought the climate in California might be better for his wife's health.)
- What reasons might cause your family to decide to move now, in modern times? In what ways would your reasons be similar to reasons of families heading west in the 1800s? In what ways would they be different? (Answers will vary.)
- Do you think it would be easier to move and start over if you had already done it before? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)

Different people heading West...

- In what ways did mountain men like Caleb Greenwood help the overland travelers? (Since the mountain men had experience traveling west already, they often acted as guides for families with wagons. They had more experience with the Native Americans that might be encountered, and could sometimes serve as interpreters or liaisons between the travelers and the native people.)
- Members of the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party had different skills and training. The group included a physician (Dr. Townsend), a gunsmith (Allen Montgomery), trappers (Caleb Greenwood, Elijah Stephens, and Isaac Hitchcock), a blacksmith (Elijah Stephens), and many others with practical experience in farming and hunting. In what ways might these different skills have helped the group be successful in their journey west? (Discuss with students what each of these skills offered, i.e. "What does a blacksmith do?" Then discuss ways in which these skills might be helpful along the trail.)

Terra Incognita - Crossing the rivers Choosing a wagon...

- The video mentions the large freight-carrying Conestoga wagon and compares it to the smaller farm wagon that was used by the overland travelers. What were the advantages of using the smaller farm wagon? (lighter in weight, able to turn in a smaller area, easier to break down for river and mountain crossings) What were the disadvantages? (limited amount of space to carry supplies.)

Following the rivers...

- What were some of the advantages of following along the rivers? (grass; water for animals and people; game to hunt and fish to catch) What were some of the disadvantages? (mosquitoes, some of which carried disease; boggy places that made traveling more difficult; contaminated water carried diseases such as cholera)

The Cut-Off - Life on the Plains

Taking a chance on a new route...

- Isaac Hitchcock suggested a cut-off that would save the group time. It was risky, leaving them two days without water, but saved them a week's travel time. The Donner Party of 1846 also followed advice to take a short-cut from the known trail, with vastly different results. Their choice cost them precious time, taking longer than the original route. Discuss the pros and cons of taking such a chance. Acting out the parts of different members of the party (Caleb Greenwood, Dr. Townsend, Mr. Murphy-head of a large family, Captain Stephens, and Mrs. Miller-mother of a new-born baby), debate whether or not to follow Hitchcock's advice.

Truckee - Indian Encounters

Encounters with the native people...

- What were some of the expectations of the overland travelers when encountering Native Americans at Ft. Laramie? (Many people had heard stories about how the Native Americans were dangerous and untrustworthy.) How were their actual experiences different from the expectations? (The party traded for horses and moccasins at Ft. Laramie. No negative experiences were described with this encounter.)

- By scouting ahead and confirming the information given them by Truckee, a Piute man, the party knew to travel west across the desert to the Truckee Meadows, where they could rest and recover after the desert crossing. What roles did luck and careful planning play in their finding the meadow? (They were fortunate in finding Truckee, which may have been a chance encounter. Mountain man Greenwood somehow communicated with Truckee to find out where the meadow was located, but Capt. Stephens, Dr. Townsend and Mr. Foster took Truckee along with them to make sure they found it before they returned to move all the wagons.)

Parting Waters - Tackling the Mountain Barrier

Making decisions...

- Up until the ascent of the Sierra Nevada mountains, the group stayed together. At the fork of the Truckee River, however, six people were sent ahead on horseback, while the rest of the group continued with all eleven wagons. Moses Schallenberger stated there was a "conference..." and they decided jointly that the group should split. This implies that the group made decisions together in a democratic way. How might this way of working together have influenced the way people felt about decisions when they were made and acted upon? (Answers will vary.)

The Summit - Crossing the Sierra

Reaching the summit...

- Once they discovered their way was blocked by a granite cliff, but had found the narrow pathway, what choices did the party have as to what to do next? (Answers may vary. Go back, but to where? Lead the animals up the narrow pathway, and pack whatever they and the oxen could carry - abandoning the wagons. Try to hoist the wagons and their supplies up and over the cliff, re-pack and go on.)

Survival Camp - New Life in California

Almost there...

- Why did the party decide to split up again, leaving the women, children, and only two of the men, behind at a camp by the Yuba River? (Snows and weary oxen made further travel with the wagons impossible. A second baby was due to be born. It was thought that the men going on ahead could travel more quickly without the wagons and their families. They would hurry on to Sutter's Fort and resupply, returning to their families as soon as possible.)

- The horseback party arrived at Sutter's Fort on December 10, 1844. They left Council Bluffs between May 18 - 22 earlier that year. Approximately how long did it take those six people to travel from Council Bluffs to Sutter's Fort? (about 6 months, 20 days)

"Good Bye Mose" - The Lonely Vigil

Alone in the mountains...

- Joseph Foster, Allen Montgomery, and Moses Schallenberger at first didn't feel that staying at the cabin through the winter was risky. They predicted how conditions in the Sierra Nevada mountains would be based on their own experiences with winter snows and hunting back home. In what ways were winters where they came from different from those in the Sierras? (Back home, the snow never got too deep before melting away. Traveling was possible throughout the winter there. In the Sierras, the snow continued to get deeper and deeper, and could no longer support a person walking on it.)

- Moses Schallenberger chose to go back to the cabin alone, rather than cause his two companions to risk their lives along with him. What were the two things that most troubled him during that lonely winter? (He worried about having enough to eat, and finding ways to kill time.)

- Moses' brother-in-law, Dr. Townsend, had left a number of books behind in his wagon. Moses read them during his stay at the cabin. Imagine yourself in Moses' circumstances... what else could you have done to help keep your mind occupied and maintain a positive outlook? (Answers will vary. Student may suggest finding materials to make things... wood carving, etc.; keeping track of the days; writing in a journal; and so on.)

A Civil War - California in turmoil

Go south, or go back - a difficult choice...

- After making camp near the Yuba River for the women and children, most of the men went on ahead to Sutter's Fort. When they arrived, they were surprised to find California facing a civil war. The Mexican governor, Micheltoarena, was being threatened by two other men, Alvarado and Castro. They wanted to remove Micheltoarena from his role as leader of Alta California. Instead of getting new supplies and returning for their families, the men from the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party joined Captain Sutter and his forces to help fight on behalf of Micheltoarena. What reasons could they have had for going with Sutter's group instead of returning to their families right away? What would you have decided... go south with Sutter's army, or go back for your family? Why? (Answers will vary.)

- The women, children, and men that had stayed at the Yuba River camp finally arrived at Sutter's Fort in early March, 1845. Knowing they left Council Bluffs between May 18 - 22, 1844, how long did it take them to travel from Council Bluffs to Sutter's Fort? (nearly 9 1/2 months)

Before Sunset - A Legacy Lives On

A legacy of names and places...

- The Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party were the first to succeed in bringing wagons over what is now called "Donner Pass," yet the pass wasn't named after the party or its captain. Instead, both the pass and the lake were named after the members of the Donner Party - who came through two years later, and suffered terribly. Should the pass have been named "Stephen's Pass" instead? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)

Follow-up Activities

Learn more about a topic...

- Using internet resources and the library, find out more about malaria. What was known about the disease in 1844? Did people know how it was transmitted? What did they do to treat it? Compare this with what we now know about malaria and how it's treated.

- What was the general attitude of people in the United States towards Catholicism in the 1840s? Try to find information from original diaries, letters, and newspapers of the time to get some clues. In old newspapers, search for advertisements for domestic help and other services, as well as stories about people and events. Libraries often have archives of old local newspapers on microfilm.

- Find out more about the animals the party encountered along the way (antelope, bison, etc.). Working in small groups, have students choose an animal to research. Find out what habitat the animal lived in, what it ate, and the range in which they were found at that time. Have students draw pictures of their animal and create a bulletin board display. Include a quote from a primary source that describes an encounter with each animal. Students can compare the range in which the animal was found in the mid-19th century with the current range. Discuss how the habitat and range may have changed over time, and what may have contributed to this change.

Create a timeline...

- What was happening in the world and within the United States between 1840-1850? Make a timeline that shows world events and discoveries, and compare that to a timeline of events and discoveries within the United States. Include events that shaped California's history, such as the war with Mexico and the gold discovery.

- What happened while the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy party was traveling? Make a timeline from May, 1844 to March, 1845. Include political events and news stories from U. S. states and territories.

Making and using maps...

- Create a classroom map tracing the route of the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party. Include landmarks and forts, rivers, and other geographical features they encountered. When known, include the dates that the party reached each of these locations.

- Using primary sources, including drawings, paintings, letters, diaries, etc., create a collage of images and descriptions of locations on your map. Use information from c1840s - early 1850s overland travelers. Have students create their own drawings based on the original images. Display the drawings on the classroom map, or bind them in a "journal," sequencing them as they would be encountered traveling east to west along the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party route.

- Using a map of California and maps of the San Francisco Bay area, find some of the locations mentioned in the video which were named for different members of the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party... Stevens Creek Blvd. in Cupertino - note the change in spelling; Schallenberger Road in San Jose; Sunnyvale, San Martin, and Murphys Ranch (places where the Murphy family settled).

- Using a map of your local area, search for streets or cities named after people from local history. Find out more about them: When did they settle in your area? Where did they come from? Why did they come to your community?

Build a model...

- Make a model of a Conestoga wagon, and a model of a typical overland traveler's covered farm wagon. Make sure that the two models are to the same scale (for example, 1" of the model size = 2' of the original dimensions). Compare the models and discuss how they were designed and used for different purposes.

- Build three-dimensional models of some of the landmarks the party encountered along the way, such as Chimney Rock, Independence Rock, Ft. Laramie, or Sutter's Fort. Label them and display them on a table-top map to show their locations along the route west.

Other Resources

A sampling of research sites and books to get you started:

Internet sites...

19th century medicine

www.cl.utoledo.edu/canaday/quackery/quack-index.html

A good source for teachers wanting an overview of the subject.

Timeline of events, 1840-1850

http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/events/1840_1850.htm

Map resources

http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/places/trails_ter/index.htm

<http://www.octa-trails.org>

Primary sources (original documents and images)

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/index.htm>

<http://www.over-land.com/diaries.html>

Stories about the trail experience

<http://www.octa-trails.org/TheLearningCenter/TrailStories/default.asp>

Links to Native American site information, and other American West topics

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/links/index.htm>

Learning more about oxen

http://www.ruralheritage.com/ox_paddock/index.htm

Books...

Across the Plains in the Donner Party; Virginia Reed Murphy; Vistabooks, 1995.

Worthy of inclusion here as Virginia was a child of 12 when her family started out. Numerous Frederick Remington engravings offer illustrations of Ft. Laramie in 1849, drawings of landmarks such as Chimney Rock, and a map of the Western Territories in the 1840s.

The California Trail; George R. Stewart; McGraw-Hill, 1962.

Helpful maps and graphics include an illustration comparing the emigrant farm wagon and a Conestoga wagon.

Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1849; Kenneth L. Holmes; University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey; Lillian Schlissel; Schocken Books, 1982.

Both of these books offer numerous first-hand descriptions of food, equipment, animals, and events along the trail.

Magazines...

Cobblestone Magazine, November 2002

Designed for the school audience, this volume is about the California Trail.