

The Mormon Trail: In search of the promised land

Directions:

1. Read the paragraph.
2. Present the paragraph a different way. Make meaning out of what you are reading by rewriting it in your own words, drawing a comic strip, etc.

PARAGRAPH 1:

The history of the Mormon Trail cannot be understood without an awareness of the Mormon religion itself. The great Mormon migration of 1846-1847 was but one step in the Mormons' quest for religious freedom and growth.

PARAGRAPH 2:

The Mormon religion, later known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, was founded by Joseph Smith on April 6, 1830 in Fayette, New York. Smith experienced visions as a teenager and would later be regarded as a prophet by the Mormons. In 1827, he claimed that an angel showed him buried gold plates which he then transcribed into The Book of Mormon. All who subscribed to the beliefs of this text became known as Mormons.

PARAGRAPH 3:

Membership grew rapidly, but not all were enthusiastic about Smith's new religion. Persecution of the Mormons led to subsequent moves westward for the church, first to Ohio, then to Missouri and then to Nauvoo, Illinois. Smith envisioned a permanent settlement in Nauvoo. But both the Mormons' time in Nauvoo and Smith's life were to be short-lived.

PARAGRAPH 4:

From 1839 until 1846, the Mormon church was headquartered in Nauvoo where church members were able to prosper and practice their religion peacefully. But before long, tensions arose when many citizens began to view the Mormons with contempt.

PARAGRAPH 5:

Mormon practices such as polygamy, in combination with the quick growth of the church, contributed to a growing intolerance among some Illinois citizens. Hostilities broke out and on June 27, 1844, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were killed by an angry mob while jailed in Carthage, Illinois.

PARAGRAPH 6:

Brigham Young stepped in as Smith's successor and immediately began furthering Smith's plans for a move to the Far West. By now, the Mormon population of Nauvoo neared 11,000, making it one of the largest cities in Illinois. Yet the persecution of Mormons continued. In one month alone in 1845, more than 200 Mormon homes and farm buildings were burned around Nauvoo in an attempt by foes to force out the Mormons.

PARAGRAPH 7:

Possible locations for a new home for the Mormons included Oregon, California and Texas. But with Smith's acquisition of John Fremont's map and report of the West in 1844, the Salt Lake region of Utah was chosen as the Mormons' destination. Young and his devotees made plans for an exodus to this new land. By 1846 the Mormon migration had begun.

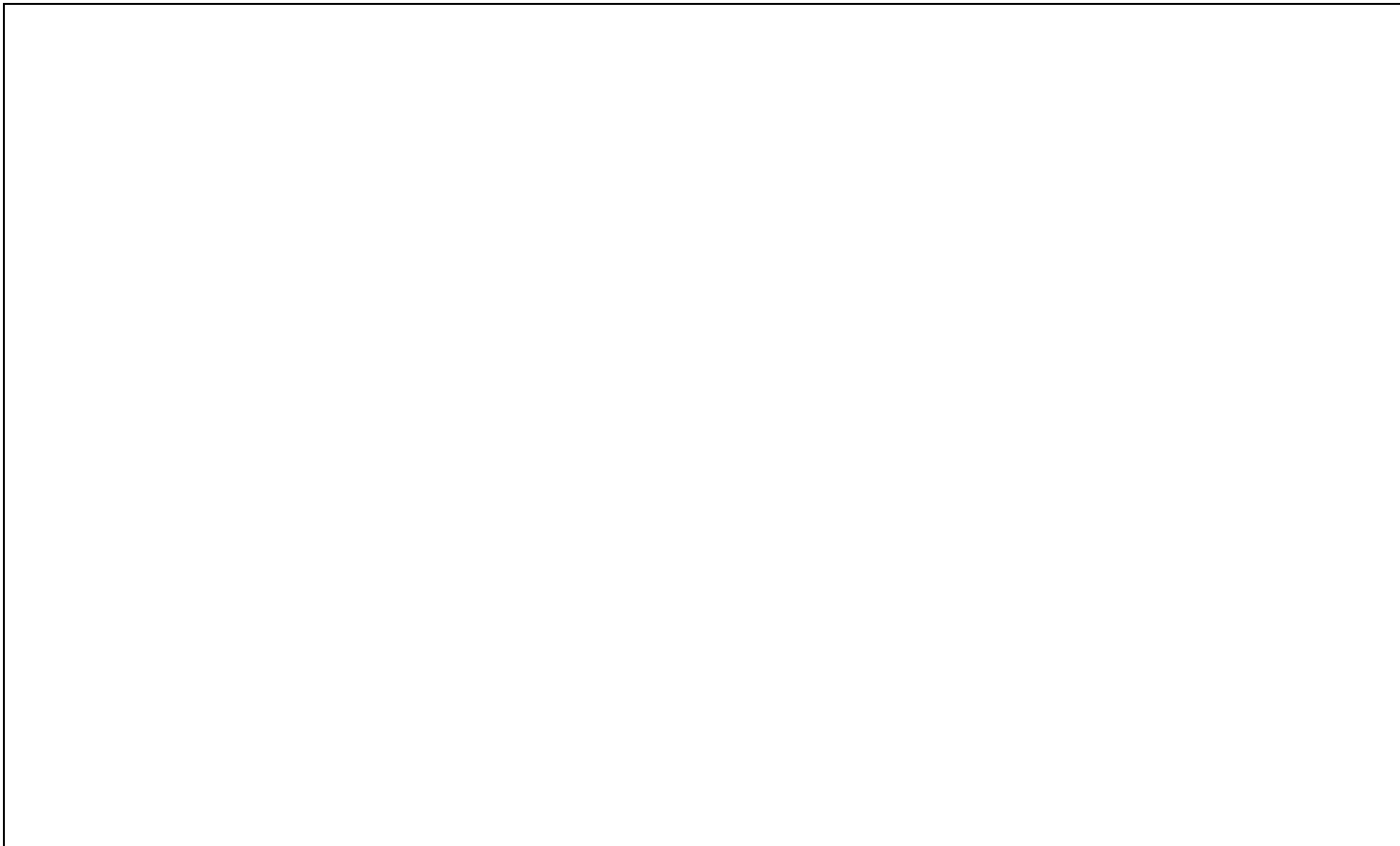
PARAGRAPH 8:

When Brigham Young and 3,000 Mormons set out for Utah on February 4, 1846, expedition leaders expected to reach their goal by the coming winter. But unforeseen difficulties forced the Mormons to abandon their original schedule. The journey was split into two sections: Nauvoo to Omaha, Nebraska in 1846; and, Omaha to the Salt Lake Valley of Utah in 1847.



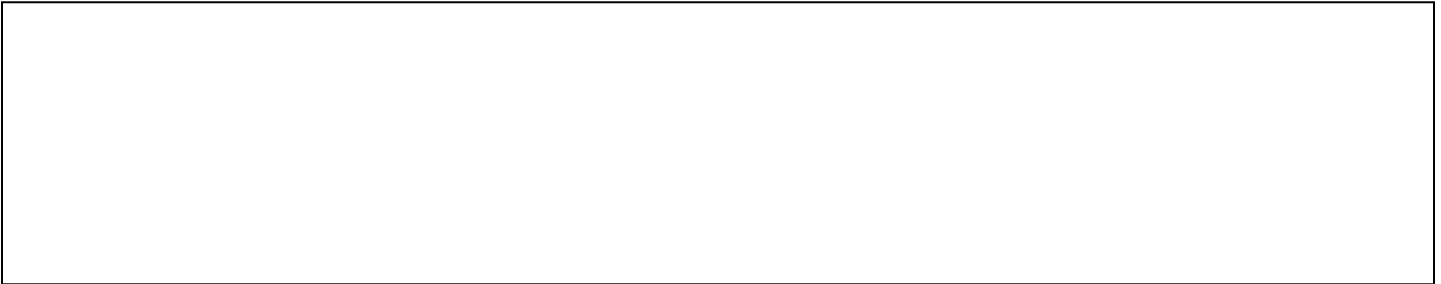
PARAGRAPH 9:

The first section - 265 miles - tested the Mormons most severely. Although plans had already been made for the first group to leave Nauvoo in the spring of 1846, rumors of federal persecution and revocation of the Nauvoo city charter persuaded Brigham Young to begin the move earlier than expected. February that year in Iowa was marked by harsh weather and bitter cold. With 500 wagons, the Mormons grimly faced miles of axle-deep mud bogs and rough, obscure trails. Many of the emigrants were unskilled in trail life and leadership was disorganized. Because of the hurried departure, important provisions had been left behind by many families. All of these factors combined to cause difficulties on a day to day basis. Yet as the Mormons forged ahead, they became more organized and began traveling in groups of 10s, 50s or 100s. To make things easier on Mormons who had delayed their departure from Nauvoo, improvements were made to the route along the way. Settlements such as Garden Grove and Mt. Pisgah were established to provide way stations for the coming immigration.



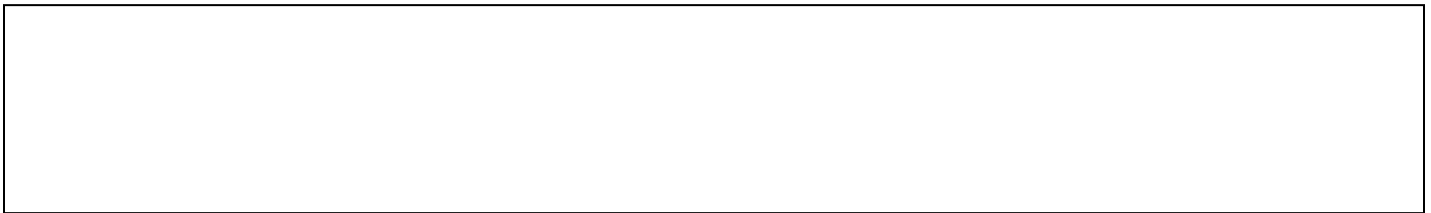
PARAGRAPH 10:

Finally, by June 13, 1846, the first group of Mormons reached the Missouri River at Council Bluffs, Iowa. It had taken 120 days to cross 265 miles for an average of 2.25 miles a day. Some of these Mormons stayed in Council Bluffs, which was renamed Kanesville, while others crossed the Missouri and established Winter Quarters in present-day Omaha.



PARAGRAPH 11:

Brigham Young decided that the original plan to reach the Rockies by fall was now impossible. The Mormons would be staying on the Missouri until the following spring. Winter Quarters would prove to be a harsh stopping place during the winter of 1846-1847. By the time the spring of 1847 approached in Winter Quarters, nearly 400 Mormon lives had been lost to various causes. Yet there was a vital bit of good news during their stay.



PARAGRAPH 12:

The news came when the famous Jesuit, Father Pierre Jean de Smet, passed through Winter Quarters on his way east. The Jesuit was one of the few white men who had ever seen the Great Salt Lake. His information on routes and conditions was extended freely to the Mormons, who eagerly anticipated their next move west.



PARAGRAPH 13:

On April 5, 1847, Brigham Young led the first Mormon wagon train out of Winter Quarters bound for Utah. Conditions, timing, experience and organization were on the Mormons' side this time and the trip went much easier than the previous year's trial. 148 people, three of whom were women, 72 wagons, and a large collection of livestock made up this first group.



PARAGRAPH 14:

On July 24, 1847, the first group of Mormons arrived at their new home in the Great Salt Lake Valley. Immediately, the Mormons began establishing the makings of a town and planted crops in preparation for the coming Mormon emigrants. From 1847 to 1869, until the completion of the transcontinental railroad, nearly 70,000 Mormons would make the journey along the Mormon Trail.

