Description: Students will learn about the Oregon Trail and then will engage in a half-mile walk around a marked trail or track to determine how long it would have taken them to travel the trail.

Learning Objectives:
- Students will learn the difficulties of traveling to the West.
- Students will learn how long it took to move to the West.

Activity Time: 55 minutes

Materials:
- A map of the Oregon Trail (see www.endoftheoregontrail.org or map of trail on page 3 of 4)
- Stopwatches (one for each group – about six)
- Chart for counting steps, one for each student (see attached)
- Open space (gymnasium, field, auditorium or cafeteria)

Directions:

Set Up:
- Research information on westward movement and the Oregon Trail.
- Determine a one-half mile “trail” for your students, which may require more than one lap. The trail can be around a track, field, gymnasium, cafeteria or auditorium.
- The day before conducting this lesson, ask students to wear walking shoes the next day to class.

Activity:
- Explain to the class that they will be studying westward movement, particularly the Oregon Trail. Discuss the Oregon Trail, addressing the challenges faced by travelers and what life was like on the trail. Show students a map of the trail.
- Explain to the class that they will be traveling to the West today, and divide the class into groups of five to six students. Tell the students that their group will be their family. Read and display this scenario to the class:

  Welcome to Independence, Missouri! In a few minutes your wagon train will be departing from Independence on the Oregon Trail.

  Your family today will be your groups. Out on the trail your family is the most important thing to you. Please make sure you are with your family at all times. (If not, you might not survive the entire journey on the trail.)
Explain the course they will be walking and that they will be timing their walk and counting their steps. Give each student a chart (page 4 of 4) to help them keep track of the number of steps they take.

Have the students meet you at the starting point. Make sure each group has a stopwatch to time their trip.

*For students with disabilities, mark off a 100-foot section on the track. Have them walk this section and count how many steps they took. This number can then be converted into a mile (5,280 feet).

Once you are out on the course, start the groups in a stagger. Remind them they must stay together the entire time, and they must record their data.

Once all groups are finished, bring them back to the classroom and have them sit in their family groups.

Display these instructions for the students to read and follow:
- Double the number of steps you took to equal the number of steps you would have taken in a mile.
- Double your half-mile time to equal the time it would have taken you to walk a mile.
- The Oregon Trail was 2,170 miles long.
  - How many steps would it have taken you to travel the Oregon Trail?
  - How much time (hours) would it have taken you to walk the trail?
  - How many days would it take you to walk the trail?

Once all students have answered the questions, have a class discussion about the data that each group gathered.

It is important to have the students realize that the hours they calculated do not include stopping for rest, sleep, meal, problems, etc. Make sure students understand what the time would be if you walked the entire length of the trail without stopping.

Extend the Activity:
- Introduce westward movement by showing a video clip of “Into the West,” a movie series sponsored by TNT. Show the clip of the wagon train departing from Independence, Missouri (15–20 minutes). Have students look for challenges and difficulties of traveling to the West while they watch the video.

Submitted by Adam Thornton, Sierra Middle School, Parker, Colorado
Correlation to National Curriculum Standards:

II. Time, Continuity & Change
   b. identify and use key concepts such as choreology, causality, change, conflict and complexity to explain, analyze, show connections among patterns of historical change and continuity
   c. identify and describe selected historical periods and patterns of change within and across cultures, such as the rise of civilizations, the development of transportation systems, the growth and breakdown of colonial systems and others
   e. develop critical sensitivities such as empathy and skepticism regarding attitudes, values and behaviors of people in different historical contexts

III. People, Places & Environments
   c. use appropriate resources, data sources and geographic tools such as aerial photographs, satellite images, geographic information systems (GIS), map projections, and cartography to generate, manipulate and interpret information such as atlases, data bases, grid systems charts, graphs and maps
   g. describe how people create places that reflect cultural values and ideals as they build neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers, and the like
   h. examine, interpret and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement patterns, cultural transmission of customs and ideas and ecosystems change

V. Individuals, Groups & Institutions
   a. demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups

From National Council for the Social Studies Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, Middle grades
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# of steps walked in one-half mile: ______________________

Time it took to walk one-half mile: ______________________