

Patrick: Adventures Along the Oregon Trail

Compared to

Virginia Standards of Learning/Essentials of Learning/History and Social Science/U.S. 1865 to Present

The young readers' book: "Patrick: Adventures Along the Oregon Trail, (Book), is a work of historical fiction. Its purpose is both to entertain and educate young readers. This comparison focuses on the educational value of the Book, by comparing it to the Virginia Standards of Learning—History and Social Science, U.S. 1865 to present (SOL/HS). The short novel does not meet all of the SOL/HS, nor did the author intend it to do so. The SOL/HS are comprehensive, and extend to modern times. The Book describes a single wagon train journey from Independence, Missouri to Oregon. Nonetheless, the book meets a portion of the SOL/HS. The format below consists of quotes from the SOL/HS, followed by information about the Book.¹

STANDARD USII.1a

“...historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship...

The Book demonstrates all three: geography, economics, and responsible citizenship. Sam Young and his wife, Patrick's father and mother, decide to undergo the arduous journey to Oregon because their neighbor has encroached on their already small farm in Missouri. The Book describes the geography of the Great Plains, mountains and coast of Oregon, and is replete with illustrations of actual landmarks along the way, including, Courthouse and Jailhouse Rocks, Chimney Rock, Independence Rock, Mount Hood and more. The Book describes why the U.S. Government offered land in Oregon to eager settlers. The British were also trying to settle Oregon, and to avoid another war, the U.S. Government was determined to "out settle" the British in the Oregon territory. The Young family gained a 160-acre farm in Oregon because of this initiative. As a preemptive move, the Union Admitted Oregon as a state in 1833, years before the Young family arrived.

STANDARD USII.1b

...historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship...

The points made above apply equally to this Standard. The Young's 35-acre farm in Missouri was too small to support them. They had to deliberate upon, and analyze, a 2,000 mile journey by mule drawn wagon to decide in the end to undergo the dangerous journey to Oregon. Their allegiance to the country that gave them their 160-acre Oregon farm is a given.

¹ In the interest of brevity, the comparisons above delete the introductory phrase in each Standard: "The student will demonstrate skills..."

STANDARD USIL.1c

...interpreting charts, graphs, and pictures to determine characteristics of people, places, or events in United States history.

The front of the Book contains a map of the Oregon Trail, so that young readers can visualize the journey across the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, and into the Oregon Valley. The Book narrates forts that they come to, soldiers they talk to, decisions to be made, landmarks passed, wildlife encountered, and hardships of the journey.

STANDARD USIL.1d

...using evidence to draw conclusions and make generalizations.

The Book exhibits detail by means of its extensive accurate illustrations. The landscape the travelers encounter is rugged, but also majestic, consisting of inspiring rock formations, mountains, wildlife, rivers, and seemingly unending plains.

STANDARD USIL.1f

... determining relationships with multiple causes or effects in United States history.

The simple discussion between Sam Young and his wife, in Patrick's presence, about his parents' frustration with the small-sized farm in Missouri gives the young reader an up close and personal insight into how and why these families decided to journey to Oregon by wagon train. This particular wagon train is small because it occurs sometime after 1870, after completion of the trans-continental railroad in 1867. The Wagon Master asks the assembled families prior to leaving why they don't want to take the train and travel by wagon instead. Answers include that the early railroad is too expensive, forces families to leave too many possessions behind, and doesn't go (at that time) to Oregon. All are historically accurate considerations.

STANDARD USIL.1h

...identify costs and benefits of a specific choice made.

The costs and benefits of taking this arduous journey are brought home in a variety of ways. There are dangers. While exploring, Patrick encounters a rattlesnake that lunges at him. The wagon train undergoes an attack by native Arapahoe Indians. The next morning Patrick ventures out, only to discover two wooden crosses in the prairie marking the graves of two travelers who died in the attack the day before. Arapahoe braves kidnap Patrick at one point and Chief Black Coal, then chief of the Northern Arapahoe tribe, subjects him to three tests. Any one of these tests could cost Patrick his life, if he failed. Raging rivers and mountains have to be crossed. At one point, a steep mountain descent requires Sam Young to invent an innovative brake for the Wagon. The overall benefit of the trip: a large 160-acre farm in Oregon.

STANDARD USII.1j

...investigating and researching to develop products orally and in writing.

The Book easily lends itself to brief written products and oral presentations by the readers. They could address questions like: “Why take the journey?” “What dangers did the travelers encounter?” “Why did the Government decide to give away these large tracts of land to families who successfully made the trip?” “Why was this wagon train only forty wagons long?” “Were the Indians all bad?” (The answer to this question, of course, is “No.” Chief Black Coal allows Patrick to return to the wagon train after Patrick passes all three tests the Chief sets out for him. The Chief also guarantees the wagon train safe passage from the Arapahoe tribes because Patrick handled himself so well.)

STANDARD USII.2a

...use maps, globes, photographs, pictures... for a) explaining how physical features and climate influenced the movement of people westward.

The Book explains why the wagon train had to leave in April—to beat the snows in the Rocky Mountains near the end of the journey. The map in the front of the Book shows how they moved steadily north and west along the Oregon Trail.

STANDARD USII.2b

...explaining relationships among natural resources, transportation...after 1865.

The Book focuses on the important natural resource to Native Americans—the buffalo—but to the travelers as well. Frontier woman Sarah Young uses her husband Sam’s Henry rifle to shoot a buffalo to eat. The book includes an illustration of a Henry. Chief Black Coal’s assurance of safe passage from attacks by the Arapahoe has a caveat: that the settlers do not shoot buffalo they do not intend to eat. The Book describes the decision families had to make about using the railroad or the wagon train to make the journey.

STANDARD USII.4a

...understand how life changed after the Civil War by a) examining the reasons for westward expansion, including its impact on American Indians.

The Book describes the reasons why the Young family wanted to leave Missouri. The Wagon Master, at one point, warns the travelers that the wagon train ahead of them had shot at some Indians, and that the Natives might take out revenge on their wagon train. Indeed, that occurs, in the form of an Indian attack. The lesson in this is to disabuse young readers that the Indians were all hostile by nature. Rather, the White settlers also bore some of the blame for hostilities.