

Program Name: Life on the Oregon Trail: A Pioneer Woman's Story

Artist: Rebecca Dempsey

Special Requirements:

Enclosed classroom or multi-purpose space; open space large enough for children to sit in a circle on the floor; long space across the front of the room for display materials; desk or table for display materials; one chair; all workshops in same room

Special Points of Interest:

Rebecca Dempsey graduated Magna Cum Laude from William Jewell College. She has performed in many musical productions including Brigadoon, Fiddler on the Roof, and Steel Magnolias.

Workshop Description

Preparing a family to move over 2,400 miles is not an easy task. It was even more challenging to travel to an unknown home at the end of the Oregon Trail in 1850.

Rebecca Dempsey created this workshop to help children explore the lives of their peers traveling through the American frontier. She gives a face to these people by portraying the mother of two children traveling to a homestead at the end of the Oregon Trail.

Rebecca brings with her an extensive knowledge of the customs, cultures, hopes, and aspirations these struggling immigrant families brought with them as they faced

challenges in the American West. The students will experience history hands-on as Rebecca allows the students to explore some of her “belongings” that she has brought with her to make the arduous journey.

Rebecca’s pioneer character brings this era alive with folk tales, songs, and games that pioneer children would have played. The workshop concludes with a question and answer session in which students can express their curiosity and gain additional insight into this American experience.

Educational Objectives & Standards

Students will:

- Explore how they might have lived in the mid-1800’s
- Learn of the hardships immigrant pioneers experienced, in particular the difficult role women had to fill in these families

National History Standards:

- Understand the broadly defined areas of state and local historical events

Theater Standards:

- Identifies people, events, time, and place in classroom dramatizations

Artist Bio: Rebecca Dempsey



Rebecca Dempsey has worked with students from preschool to high school since 1970. She writes, directs, and teaches workshops for children in Kindergarten through fifth grade.

Rebecca has acted in more than 50 productions since 1993 and has directed youth in five musicals. Rebecca also worked with a group that played improv games with children for many years.

A professional actress, Rebecca performs in television and radio commercials, corporate training videos, films, and live theater. Rebecca combines her love of teaching children with her joy in acting through this KCYA workshop.

Rebecca is also a skilled musician who can play hand bells and sight-read vocal music. She is adept at British and Cockney dialects and can cry on cue.

List of Resources:

Books:

Trinklein, Michael J.
Fantastic Facts about the Oregon Trail.
Boettcher/Trinklein, 1995

Parkman, Francis, Brandt, Anthony (Introduction), Earhart, Amelia.
The Oregon Trail.
National Geographic.
2002

Online Resources:

The Trail Band.
Voices from The Oregon Trail
(Original Score Recording).
Trails End Prod., 2000

Oregon Trail Fifth Editon.
MAC OS, Windows
95/98/Me/2000/XP.
The Learning Company,
2001.

Contact KCYA for more information about this and other programs

816.531.4022
KCYA.org

Vocabulary

Abolitionist: a reformer who favors abolishing slavery

Cholera: One of several diseases affecting the digestive and intestinal tract and more or less dangerous to life

Contrary: resistant to guidance or discipline, very opposed in nature or character or purpose

Lolly-gaggin’: to procrastinate, to take a lackadaisical approach to completing a task or chore

Meet the Elephant: phrase derived from folk tale about hardship and gaining satisfaction from the challenge. “Everyone who crossed the Plains had their own elephant.”

Overlanders: People who travel over lands or countries

Retaliation: action taken in return for an injury or offense

Post-Workshop Activities

1. Draw a map of the United States from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean. Color code areas for the homelands of the different Native American tribes who populated the Oregon Trail
2. Make a timeline of the 19th century, 1800-1900. Mark these events on the timeline: Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clarks Expedition, when Missouri and Kansas entered the Union, discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill, the Civil War, and each President’s term in office
3. Make up a game for a group of children that uses only themselves or materials that would have been available to pioneers on the Oregon Trail in the 1850s. Play the game, then try to improve upon it.