

Choices on the Trail

Read how opportunity cost shapes decisions over time.

SS4E1.a “Describe opportunity cost and its relationship to decision-making across time (e.g., decisions to settle in the west).”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline words that show what settlers chose or hoped to gain, circle words that show what they gave up or risked, and write 1, 2, or 3 beside ideas about first, later, or longer.

A Westward Choice

- ① In the 1840s, some U.S. families decided to travel west on the Oregon Trail. They hoped to find farmland and build new homes in Oregon Country. The trip took months in covered wagons and brought risks from illness, accidents, and bad weather. A decision meant choosing one path when other paths were also possible to them.
- ② Opportunity cost is the next best thing a person gives up when making a choice. For a family leaving Missouri for Oregon, the cost could be staying near relatives, keeping a familiar farm, or earning money in town. The family could not use the same time and supplies for both the journey and life at home. Their western dream had a cost.
- ③ Opportunity cost can look different as time passes. At first, settlers gave up familiar places and faced a hard journey. Years later, a successful farm might provide more land or income than they had before. But a poor harvest or loneliness could make the choice feel costly for longer. People considered possible results now and later before deciding.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What decision did some families make in the 1840s?

2 Name two things a family might give up by leaving Missouri for Oregon.

3 Why could a family not use the same time and supplies for both the journey and life at home?

4 How could the cost of moving west look different years after the trip?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Imagine an 1840s family chooses to stay in Missouri instead of traveling west. Write exactly three sentences. Name its opportunity cost, then compare one result now with one possible result later.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline words that show what settlers chose or hoped to gain, circle words that show what they gave up or risked, and write 1, 2, or 3 beside ideas about first, later, or longer. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What decision did some families make in the 1840s?	They decided to travel west on the Oregon Trail to Oregon Country.
2	Name two things a family might give up by leaving Missouri for Oregon.	Answers may include staying near relatives, keeping a familiar farm, or earning money in town.
3	Why could a family not use the same time and supplies for both the journey and life at home?	Choosing the journey meant that the family's time and supplies could not also be used for life at home.
4	How could the cost of moving west look different years after the trip?	A successful farm might bring more land or income later, while a poor harvest or loneliness could make the choice feel costly longer.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Reed family chooses to stay in Missouri near their relatives. Their opportunity cost is the chance to farm land in Oregon, but they keep their familiar farm now. Later, they may value family support, or they may wish they had moved if Oregon land becomes valuable.

Accept equivalent opportunity costs and time-based outcomes that match the passage. For Part 3, accept reasonable possible results as long as the student names what the family gives up and compares now with later.