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Activity Guide

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Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie

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ABOUT THE STORY

Hattie Campbell and her family live in Missouri, but they decide to join a wagon train going west along the Oregon Trail. Hattie has been given a diary as a present, and she records the events – good and bad – that occur on the six-month long journey.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristiana Gregory was born in Los Angeles, California and grew up on the West Coast. She worked as a reporter and a book reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*. Her first book, *Jenny of the Tetons*, was published in 1989 and won the Golden Kite Award for best children's fiction. Since then, she has written many books about the Old West and California history and historical novels, including *The Winter of Red Snow*, another Live Oak Readalong in the Dear America series. She lives in Boise, Idaho with her husband, their two teenage sons, and two golden retrievers.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask students what they know about journeys by covered wagon. Point out that when people first traveled to the West Coast of America, they often went by covered wagon. Explain that the book they will read is a diary written by a young girl who is going to Oregon in a covered wagon.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- “How does Hattie’s family manage to afford the riverboat trip?”
- “How does Cassia die?”
- “What happens when a wagon gets ‘stumped’?”
- “How many babies were born on the journey?”
- “Why was Mrs. Kenker stealing people’s belongings?” (*Draw Conclusions*)
- “How does Hattie’s opinion of Mrs. Biggs change?” (*Compare and Contrast*)
- “What do you think was the most difficult aspect of the journey?” (*Make Judgments*)

Vocabulary

Write these words from the book on the chalkboard. Ask students to write them in alphabetical order and then use a dictionary to define each word. Then have students compose three sentences of their own, using a vocabulary word in each.

calico cog orphan moccasins carcass channel

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: Mapping the Trail

Have students work in small groups to create a map of the Oregon Trail. Provide them with posterboard and markers. Ask them to draw an outline of the United States and mark the city of Independence, Missouri, where many wagons started their journey. From there, they can draw the Oregon Trail, marking various rivers and forts that Hattie mentions in her diary. Hang completed maps around the classroom.

Health: Dangers on the Trail

Hattie experiences many health threats on her trip to Oregon. Have students work in pairs to research one of the problems she comes across:

- Swamp fever (malaria)
- Rattlesnake bite
- Hemlock poisoning
- Measles

Pairs can explain the cause and symptoms of the illness or problem, and describe any treatment there might have been at the time. Encourage students to report on what they learn to the class.

Social Studies: Write a Biography

Hattie meets or hears about several real-life adventurers on her journey. Have students find out about one of these historical characters and write a brief biography of him or her.

- Kit Carson
- Jim Bridger
- Narcissa Whitman
- Brigham Young

Language Arts: Diary Entry

Have students imagine they are traveling on the Oregon Trail themselves. Ask them to write their own diary entry for one of the experiences Hattie had. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings about the experience. Volunteers can share their entries with the class.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Other Oregon Trail Diaries

Have students use the keywords *Oregon Trail diary* to find real examples of journals kept by people who traveled the Oregon Trail. Encourage them to read through entries and pick one that they would like to share with the class. Students can copy or print out the entry they have chosen and read it aloud. Encourage discussion of similarities and differences between the actual journal entries and Hattie’s diary.