

Pack Your Wagon

Activity Overview: Have you ever packed all your belongings and moved to a new home or went on a long trip? This activity explores the Conestoga wagon, one of Iowa's earliest modes of transportation. Early Iowa settlers needed to pack everything they would need for long trips within these wagons.

Connection to Iowa History

The Iowa Territory was formed on July 4, 1838. Iowa's population grew quickly from 10,531 people in 1836 to 43,112 in 1840. As the new territory began to grow, people from various backgrounds packed their belongings into Conestoga wagons to move within the newly-established territory.

Conestoga wagons are large, covered wagons used for long-distance travel. Since there were no grocery stores along the trails, everything the travelers would need on the journey must fit within their Conestoga wagon. These wagons were designed with curved floors at each end to help prevent items moving, and it could hold up to 2,400 lbs. of supplies. Their famous white canvas cover helped protect the wagon's contents from the rain, and were soaked in linseed oil to make it waterproof. Although people traveled with the wagons, they would not ride but walk alongside it. Each Conestoga wagon was pulled by four to six horses, oxen or mules, and traveled about 10 to 15 miles per day.



Instructions [\(Video Instructions Available\)](#)

- 1 **Pre-Activity:** To visualize the size of a Conestoga wagon, use tape or string to create a rectangle on the floor. A wagon was 18 feet long and 4 feet wide.
- 2 **Worksheet.** Read and complete the ["Pack Your Wagon" worksheet](#).
- 3 **Compare.** After completing your list, compare your selections with others. Debate and work together to create a new combined list.
- 4 **Share!** If you would like to share your worksheet with the State Historical Museum of Iowa, please email it to museum.education@iowa.gov. We want to celebrate your work!

Materials

- Pencil or pen
- [Worksheet](#)
- Masking tape or string

5 Questions to Spark Learning

- What things would you like to take with you when you travel today? How is that different from what people needed to pack in the Conestoga wagons?
- Would you like to travel in a Conestoga wagon? Why or why not?
- What would be the most important things you would want to bring with you? Why?

6 Additional Resources

Explore these resources below to learn more about the history of transportation and immigration in Iowa.

- [Immigration Transportation Video from Iowa PBS](#)
- [Primary Source Set: Innovation in Transportation](#)
- [Primary Source: Population in Iowa in 1850 and 1860 U.S. Censuses](#)
- [Transportation in Iowa: A Historical Summary from the Iowa DOT](#)

Pack Your Wagon Worksheet

Covered wagons were a popular choice for transportation when Iowa became a territory, but these wagons could only hold so much. Below is a shopping list of supplies that a typical family might take with them on their journey to settle in the Iowa Territory. It is up to you to bring enough supplies to last the trip. You cannot take more than 2,400 lbs. of items with you.

When packing your wagon for the journey, you will need to include:

- Shelter - Somewhere to sleep
- Food - Something to eat
- Medical - Something to help if you are sick
- Leisure - Something to do for fun

Including yourself, how many people live with you? This will be the total number of people joining you on the journey. **Number of People in Your Wagon:** _____

Food List

| Item | Description | Recommended Amount (per person) | How many lbs. do you want to bring? |
|---|---|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Apple Cider Vinegar | Used for canning, and could be used for scrapes and cuts | 20 lbs. | |
| Bacon | Salted meat product that could last a long time | 75 lbs. | |
| Baking Soda | Used for baking breads | 2 lbs. | |
| Beans | Good source of protein and could last a long time | 40 lbs. | |
| Coffee | Very popular beverage to help wake you up in the morning | 5 lbs. | |
| Cornmeal | Used for baking and cooking | 35 lbs. | |
| Dried Fruit | Could last a long time, and used for baking | 15 lbs. | |
| Dried Meat | Good source of protein, and could last a long time | 150 lbs. | |
| Eggs | Used for cooking and baking, but did not last long | 5 lbs. | |
| Flour | Used to make bread, hardtack and other baking needs | 200 lbs. | |
| Hardtack | Cracker-like biscuit that is long-lasting and helps with hunger | 30 lbs. | |
| Lard | Used for cooking and similar to butter | 40 lbs. | |
| Rice | Used for cooking | 10 lbs. | |
| Salt | Used for preserving meats and cooking | 10 lbs. | |
| Sugar | Used in baking | 25 lbs. | |
| Tea | Flavored drink | 2 lbs. | |
| Total Food Weight | | | lbs. |
| Total Food Weight x Number of People in Your Wagon | | | lbs. |

Pack Your Wagon Worksheet

Dry Goods List

| Item | Description | Recommended Amount (per person) | How many lbs. do you want to bring? |
|---|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Ax | Used for chopping wood | 10 lbs. | |
| Bedroll | Used for sleeping and bedding | 15 lbs. | |
| Books | Reading and research materials | 1 to 20 lbs. | |
| Butter Churn | Used for making butter | 10 lbs. | |
| Candles/Lanterns | Used to help see in the dark | 5 to 20 lbs. | |
| Cast Iron Stove | For cooking meals and to be used in your new home | 350 lbs. | |
| Clothing | Extra clothing if the weather changes or something falls apart | 10 to 50 lbs. | |
| Cookware | Pots and pans for cooking | 10 to 30 lbs. | |
| Furniture | Chairs, tables, clocks or anything else for the home | 5 to 100 lbs. | |
| Hammer | Used for construction | 5 lbs. | |
| Medicine | Used in case of an illness or disease | 10 lbs. | |
| Plow | Used for farming | 50 lbs. | |
| Rope | To help tie things together | 5 to 20 lbs. | |
| Shovel | Used for digging holes | 10 lbs. | |
| Tent | To provide shelter at night | 60 lbs. | |
| Toys | To provide entertainment | 2 to 50 lbs. | |
| Additional Items | Anything not included on the list | | |
| Total Dry Goods Weight | | | lbs. |
| Total Dry Goods Weight + Total Food Weight | | | lbs. |

Is it less than 2,400 lbs.? YES or NO

Reminder: You cannot take more than 2,400 lbs. of items in the wagon.