

# 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](mailto:museum.education@iowa.gov). We want to celebrate your work!

### 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**

## Materials

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

# 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.	
<b>Total Food Weight</b>			<b>lbs.</b>
<b>Total Food Weight x Number of People in Your Wagon</b>			<b>lbs.</b>

# 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		
<b>Total Dry Goods Weight</b>			<b>lbs.</b>
<b>Total Dry Goods Weight + Total Food Weight</b>			<b>lbs.</b>

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

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