

eMPower™ **ME**

**STUDENT  
SAMPLE ITEM BOOKLET**

**Reading**

**Grade 6**





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# Sample Items

## Directions

You will now read two related passages and answer the questions that follow. Some of these questions will ask you to compare the two passages.

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### Passage 1

#### Ho, for Sacramento

*by David R. Leeper*

- 1 On February 22, 1849, our party of six set out from South Bend, Indiana, for the newly discovered goldfields of California. We were William Good, Michael Donahue, Thomas Rockhill, William Earl, Thomas Neal, and me, the writer, David Leeper. We were young: the oldest twenty-five, the youngest seventeen.
- 2 Our equipment consisted of two wagons, seven yoke of oxen, and two years' supplies. The long journey before us, the unknown region through which it lay, and the glamour of the object for which it was undertaken, lent our adventure considerable local interest. Many friends and spectators were present to witness our departure. Our two covered wagons were objects of much curious concern as they rolled out of town with two thousand miles of wilderness before them.
- 3 For us the occasion had few pangs. The gold diggings had been discovered but a twelve-month before. The glowing tales of the marvelous riches were on every tongue. Our enthusiasm was wrought up to the highest pitch. The hardships and perils of such a journey were scarcely given a passing thought. Several parties of our acquaintance had already gone before us. Others were preparing to go, which further intensified our eagerness.
- 4 It was therefore with light hearts, and perhaps lighter heads, that we lustily joined in the chorus of the inspiring ditty of the time:
- 5 "Oh, California!  
That's the land for me.  
I am going to Sacramento  
With my washbowl on my knee!"
- 6 In 1849 the West was still very new. Even Chicago had not heard the whistle of the locomotive. Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri were, for the most part, an unbroken prairie with ten to twenty miles between neighbors. The cooing of prairie chickens filled the air like the roar of a distant waterfall. The grasslands were strewn with antlers of deer and elk, attesting to the abundance of this game.
- 7 Westward of Iowa and Missouri, the vast area of mountains and plains stretched away to where the surf beat of the Pacific laves the golden shore. This region was laid down on maps as *Terra Incognita*, the Unknown Land. Except at three or four isolated spots, where a mission or military post had been set up, not an abode of the white man was to be seen.
- 8 This was the land we were determined to cross to reach our goal: California or bust!

**Not a Holiday Junket**

- 9 We were not long in finding out that the adventure meant more than poetry and romance.
- 10 We left home in the midst of a thaw and from the very start were beset with mud. We were frequently compelled to make wide detours, avoiding the roads, so as to escape the floods and bottomless lowlands. Added to the difficulties of travel were the inconveniences suffered from the scantiness of accommodations for ourselves and our animals.
- 11 William Good and William Earl sported better clothes than their companions. On starting upon the journey, Good wore a silk hat and Earl a swallowtail coat. The hat soon became battered. One sleeve of the coat was chewed into pulp up to the elbow by an ox, but Earl continued to wear the garment proudly.
- 12 The irksomeness of the journey was somewhat relieved by our naturally buoyant party. We were able to muster several musical instruments: violin, banjo, tambourine, and castanets. We were all backwoods vocal virtuosos. Singing and playing, we whiled away many an evening by our campfires, which otherwise would have dragged heavily on our hands. In fact, our musical fame spread far and near along our route. It won us the reputation of being the wildest and jolliest lot of Hoosiers ever let loose outside the hoop pole and pumpkin state.
- 13 Camp experience was by no means conducive to sweetness of temper. In fact, it was a common remark that men were decidedly more irascible on the plains than they had been at home, not infrequently culminating in hot words and sometimes in blows.
- 14 St. Joseph, Missouri, was our objective point on the frontier. We found this border city, the last outpost of civilization, thronged with gold seekers like ourselves. They had flocked hither from every quarter for the overland journey. Many had pushed out before our arrival. Many were still coming in and all was hurry-scurry with excitement.
- 15 The only transportation available for crossing the Missouri River was a big clumsy flatboat propelled by long oars. We chartered this craft for one night with several other parties, and our wagons rolled onboard. The price stipulated was ninety dollars, and we were to perform the labor. The task was by no means a holiday diversion! I tugged at one of those oars myself all night long, and it seemed a long, long night indeed.

**Adieu to Civilization!**

- 16 On May 16, we pulled from the Missouri River through the muddy timbered bottom to the open bluffs. We had now bid adieu to civilization. Some fifteen hundred miles lay before us. Many emigrants were encamped about us. We were, therefore, not long in marshaling a train of some sixty wagons equipped with officers and a bristling code of rules. Guards were to pass their beats regularly and the animals were all to be carefully corralled at night by arranging the wagons into a circle.
- 17 As we pushed out from the river bluffs into the open country beyond, our long line of "prairie schooners" looked sightly as it gracefully wound itself over the green billowy landscape.

"Ho, for Sacramento" by David R. Leeper, from *The Diary of David R. Leeper: Rushing for Gold*. Copyright © 2001 by Connie and Peter Roop. Published by Benchmark Books.

**Passage 2**  
**Sweet Betsy from Pike**

*by John A. Stone*

- 1     *Getting to California during the gold rush days was hard work—and so was living there! Some call this song the state’s unofficial anthem.*
- 2     Oh, do you remember sweet Betsy from Pike,  
Who crossed the wide prairies with her lover, Ike?  
With two yoke of oxen, a big yaller dog,  
A tall Shanghai rooster, and one spotted hog.
- 3     Hoodle dang, fol de dye do, hoodle dang, fol de day.
- 4     The rooster ran off and the oxen all died;  
The last piece of bacon that morning was fried.  
Poor Ike got discouraged and Betsy got mad;  
The dog wagged his tail and looked wonderfully sad.
- 5     Hoodle dang, fol de dye do, hoodle dang, fol de day.
- 6     The alkali desert was burning and hot,  
And Ike, he decided to leave on the spot:  
“My dear old Pike County, I’ll go back to you.”  
Said Betsy, “You’ll go by yourself if you do.”
- 7     Hoodle dang, fol de dye do, hoodle dang, fol de day.
- 8     They swam the wide rivers, they crossed the tall peaks,  
They camped out on prairies for weeks and for weeks,  
Fought off starvation and big storms of dust,  
Determined to reach California or bust.
- 9     Hoodle dang, fol de dye do, hoodle dang, fol de day.
- 10    They passed the Sierras through mountains of snow,  
Til old California was sighted below.  
Sweet Betsy, she hollered, and Ike gave a cheer,  
Said, “Betsy, my darlin’, I’m a made millionaire.”
- 11    Hoodle dang, fol de dye do, hoodle dang, fol de day.

“Sweet Betsy from Pike” by John A. Stone, from *From Sea to Shining Sea: A Treasury of American Folklore and Folk Songs*. Compilation copyright © 1993 by Amy L. Cohn. Published by Scholastic Inc.

*This question has two parts. Be sure to answer both parts of the question.*

1. In Passage 1, how do the men start out on their trip?

- A with anxiety about the unknown
- B with many positive thoughts
- C with worries about the length of the journey
- D with eagerness to see the wildlife

Which choice provides the **best** evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A "Our two covered wagons were objects of much curious concern."
- B "They rolled out of town with two thousand miles of wilderness before them."
- C "Our enthusiasm was wrought up to the highest pitch."
- D "The cooing of prairie chickens filled the air like the roar of a distant waterfall."

2. In Passage 1, which of the following details suggests the men are going toward more dangerous territory?

- A They have to row the boat all night long.
- B The border city is full of gold seekers.
- C They see a long line of prairie schooners.
- D They appoint guards to help keep them secure.

3. How do the last two paragraphs of Passage 1 contribute to the development of the selection?

- A They summarize the group's trip up to this point.
- B They describe the beauty of the countryside in detail.
- C They demonstrate what the men have already learned from traveling.
- D They explain what the men expect on the next leg of their journey.

4. Which of the following statements **best** summarizes Passage 2?
- A Well-prepared pioneers had enough food for their journey.
  - B Making music was a part of the way of life during the trip westward.
  - C Pioneers who made it to California were able to enjoy the good life.
  - D Determined pioneers endured many difficulties on the way to California.
5. The journey described in Passage 1 is similar to the journey in Passage 2 because the pioneers in both passages
- A travel with a large group of pioneers throughout the journey.
  - B decide to turn back for home at one point during the journey.
  - C are able to successfully arrive at their destination in California.
  - D are determined to reach California despite the hardships on the way.
6. Based on Passage 1, imagine you are William Earl. Write about how your view of the journey has changed since you started out in South Bend, Indiana.
- Be sure to include an opening and closing.
  - Be sure to use details from Passage 1.
  - Be sure to use precise words and sentences.