**Objective:** Students will write their own pioneer journal or diary using the information they have learned through primary sources.

**Purpose:** To practice creative writing techniques and brainstorming. Students will apply historical facts learned about the lives of pioneers moving west in the 19th century.

**Materials:** Pencil and paper, primary sources for historical reference

**Discussion:**
1. Ask students to brainstorm for their pioneer journal by asking questions about what they think it was like to be a pioneer moving west. Possible questions to include:
   - What do you think it felt like to leave your home for a new life?
   - What kind of dangers could you face on the trail?
   - What would you feel excited about?
   - Journeying west in a wagon could take 3 to 6 months depending on weather and trail conditions. What would you miss the most about home? What would you find difficult? What would be easy?

**Activity:**
**Sensory Brainstorming:**
Tell students to get out a piece of paper and pencil. Ask them to pretend they are a pioneer traveling west. They have been on the trail for about a month now. Have them imagine that it’s an early morning and they are setting out for another day traveling west. Ask them to make a list of all the things they see, hear, smell, and can feel, both emotions and tangible objects. Prompt them with suggestions such as “What noises are the oxen making?” “Are people talking to each other or are they being quiet?” or “Do you hear anything out in the distance? What is it?” After about three to five minutes of creating this list, have the students stop and review what they’ve written. Ask for some examples.

**Option 1: Journal or Diary**
Using the brainstorming lists, have the students write their own journal or diary entries about what it’s like being a pioneer. They should describe things they are seeing and feeling, and perhaps what they are planning to do when they arrive to their new home. Encourage them to use the examples from their primary sources if they get stuck. Prompt them as necessary.

**Option 2: Short Story**
Using the brainstorming lists, have students write a short story about a single day on the trail for a pioneer. Students should use their primary sources and any other research they’ve conducted in or out of class to flesh out the details of their story. Make sure that students understand a story, even a short one, has a beginning, middle, and end. Prompt students as necessary.
**Bonus Activity:**
Once students have completed their diaries or short stories, help them bind their writing in brown construction paper to make it look more like a historic diary. You can help them punch holes in the construction paper and their writing sheets and then tie it all together with string or yarn. Encourage students to write the title of their work on the cover of their “diary.”

**Conclusion:**
When everyone is finished, ask for volunteers to read their story. Ask for a show of hands from the others who thought of some of the same things in their stories. Explain to students the difference between a primary source and the historical fiction that they wrote. Tell students that even people who make up stories to write often do a lot of historic research to make their stories sound more authentic.
This source is a reminiscence. That means someone shared this personal story about their past after it happened. The writer of this reminiscence is Alvin Aaron Coffey. Coffey, an enslaved man, traveled to California with slave owner, Dr. Bassett. While in California, Coffey saved $616 to buy his freedom. Dr. Bassett took the money and re-sold Coffey into slavery in New Orleans. Coffey returned to California in 1854. He saved enough money to buy his freedom and the freedom of his family in 1857.

I started from St. Louis Missouri, on the 2nd day of April in 1849. There was quite a crowd of the neighbors who drove through the mud and rain to St. Joe to see us off. About the 1st of May we organized the train. There were twenty wagons in the number and from three to five men to each wagon.

We crossed the Missouri River at Savanna Landing on about the 6th, no, the 1st week in May. There were several trains ahead of us. I was one of the three who were on the first night guard. At 12 o’clock three more men took our place and we went to camp. At 6 in the morning there were three more went to relieve those on guard. One of that three that came in had Cholera so bad that he was in lots of misery. Doctor Basset, the Captain of the train, did all he could for him, but he died at 10 o’clock, and we buried him. We got ready and started at 11 the same day and the moon was new just then.

We got news every day that people were dying by the hundreds in St. Joe and St. Louis. It was alarming. When we hitched up and got ready to move the Dr. said, “Boys we’ll have to drive day and night.”

There were only three saddle-horses in the train Dr. Basset, Mr. Hale Sr, and John Triplet owning them. They rode with the Dr. to hunt camping places. We drove night and day and got out of reach of the Cholera. There was none ahead of us that we knew of.

Dave and Ben Headspeth’s train was ahead of us. They had 14 or 15 wagons in the train and three to five men to a wagon. Captain Camel had another such train. When we caught up with them, we never heard of one case of Cholera on their trains.

We got across the plains to Fort Larimie [sic] the 16th of June and the ignorant ox driver broke down a good many oxen on the trains. There were a good many ahead of us, who had doubled up their trains and left tons upon tons of bacon and other provisions.

When we got pretty well down the Humboldt to a place called Lawsons Meadow, which was quite away from the sink of the Humboldt, the emigrants agreed to
divide there. There was good grass at Lawsons Meadow. We camped there a day and two nights, resting the oxen, for we had a desert to cross to get to where there was grass and water.

Starting to cross the desert to Black Rock at 4 o’clock in the evening we traveled all night. The next day it was hot and sandy. When within 20 miles of Black Rock, we saw it very plainly.

A great number of cattle perished before we got to Black Rock. When about 15 miles from Black Rock, a team of four oxen was left on the road just where the oxen had died. Everything was left in the wagon.

I drove our oxen all the time and I knew how much an ox could stand. Between 9 and 10 o’clock a breeze came up and the oxen threw up their heads and seemed to have new life. At noon we drove into Black Rock...
This source is a diary. A person writes in a diary to keep a record of what happened during their day. Amelia Stewart Knight wrote these diary entries when she and her family traveled West to the Oregon Territory in 1853. She probably wrote many of these entries when their wagon train stopped for the day.

Saturday, April 9, 1853  Started from home about 11 o’clock and traveled 8 miles and camped in an old house; night cold and frosty.

Sunday, April 10th  Cool and pleasant, road hard and dusty. Evening—Came 8 ½ miles and camped close to the Fulkersons house.

Monday, April 11th  Morn. Cloudy and sign of rain, about 10 o’clock it began to rain. At noon it rains so hard we turn out and camp in a school house after traveling 11 ½ miles; rains all the afternoon and all night, very unpleasant. Jefferson and Lucy have the mumps. Poor cattle bawled all night.

Saturday, April 16th  Camped last night three miles east of Chariton Point in the prairie. Made our beds down in the tent in the wet and mud. Bed clothes nearly spoiled. Cold and cloudy this morning and every body out of humour. Seneca is half sick. Plutarch has broke his saddle girth. Husband is scolding and hurrying all hands (and the cook) and Almira says she wished she was home, and I say ditto. “Home Sweet Home.”

Wednesday, April 20th  Cloudy. We are creeping along slowly, one wagon after another, the same old gait; and the same thing over, out of one mud hole into another all day. Crossed a branch where the water run into the wagons. No corn to be had within 75 miles. Came 18 miles and camp.

Monday, May 2  Pleasant evening; have been cooking, and packing things away for an early start in the morning. Threw away several jars, some wooden buckets, and all our pickles. Too unhandy to carry. Indians came to our camp every day, begging money and something to eat. Children are getting used to them.

Sunday, May 8th  Still in camp. Waiting to cross [the Elkhorn River]. There are three hundred or more wagons in sight and as far as the eye can reach, the bottom is covered, on each side of the river, with cattle and horses. There is no ferry here and the men will have to make one out of the tightest wagon-bed (every company should have a waterproof wagon-bed for this purpose.) Everything must now be hauled out of the wagons head over heels (and he who knows where to find anything will be a smart fellow.) then the wagons must be all taken to pieces, and then by means of a strong rope stretched across the river with a tight wagon-bed attached to the middle of it, the rope must be long enough to pull from one side to the other, with men on each side of the river to pull it. In this way we have to cross everything a little at a time. Women and children last, and then swim the cattle and horses. There were three horses and some cattle drowned while crossing this place yesterday. It is quite lively and merry here this morning and the weather fine. We are camped on a large bottom, with the broad, deep river on one side of us and a high bluff on the other.
**Wednesday, June 1st** It has been raining all day long and we have been traveling in it so as to be able to keep ahead of the large drovers. The men and boys are all soaking wet and look sad and comfortless. (The little ones and myself are shut up in the wagons from the rain. Still it will find its way in and many things are wet; and take us all together we are a poor looking set, and all this for Oregon. I am thinking while I write, “Oh Oregon, you must be a wonderful country.” Came 18 miles today.)

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**Tuesday, June 7th** Rained some last night; quite warm today. Just passed Fort Laramie, situated on the opposite side of the river. This afternoon we passed a large village of Sioux Indians. Numbers of them came around our wagons. Some of the women had moccasins and beads, which they wanted to trade for bread. I gave the women and children all the cakes I had baked. Husband traded a big Indian a lot of hard crackers for a pair of moccasins and after we had started he came up with us again making a great fuss, and wanted them back (they had eaten part of the crackers). He did not seem to be satisfied, or else he wished to cause us some trouble, or perhaps get into a fight. However, we handed the moccasins to him in a hurry and drove away from them as soon as possible.

... 

**Monday, August 8th** We have to make a drive of 22 miles, without water today. Have our cans filled to drink. Here we left unknowingly our Lucy behind, not a soul had missed her until we had gone some miles, when we stopped a while to rest the cattle; just then another train drove up behind us with Lucy. She was terribly frightened and so were some more of us when we found out what a narrow escape she had run. She said she was sitting under the bank of the river, when we started, busy watching some wagons cross, and did not know we were ready. And I supposed she was in Mr. Carl’s wagon, as he always took care of Francis and Lucy, and I took care of Myra and Chat, when starting he asked for Lucy, and Francis said “She is in Mother’s wagon,” as she often went there to have her hair combed. It was a lesson to all of us. Evening—It is near dark and we are still toiling on till we find a camping place. The little ones have curled down and gone to sleep without supper. Wind high, and it is cold enough for a great coat and mittens.

... 

**Friday, Sept. 17th** In camp yet. Still raining. Noon—It has cleared off and we are all ready for a start again, for some place we don’t know where...

    A few days later my eighth child was born. After this we picked up and ferried across the Columbia River, utilizing skiff, canoes and flatboat to get across, taking three days to complete. Here husband traded two yoke of oxen for a half section of land with one-half acre planted to potatoes and a small log cabin and lean-to with no windows. This is the journey’s end.

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Jacksonville Texas May 12th, 1850
Dear Brother time & opportunity afford me the good pleasure of addressing you with afew (sic) lines which will inform you that I and my little family are still enjoying good health though I myself have had afew chills this spring but in fine health at this time Milt I have not written to you since I left New Orleans but you must excuse me as I looked for you out here for a long time I did not know where you were nor what you were doing until I received a letter from Brother william some month or six weeks ago I learned from that- that you were still staying with Mother- I have nothing good to write to you nor nothing very bad more than we have had for the last six weeks almost an incessant rain together with a very (sic) cold and backward spring which makes the farmers quake & tremble our cotton is now running on fine pasture and if the rains do not cease we will see h.ll (sic) – before we get it up of (sic) the range- our corn crop is fine though it was bit down by the frost once and covered four inches deep once in snow after being ploughed the first time a good many people about have taken blues & some not only the blues but the real mad horrors

Page 2
I had the pleasure of J.T. Hesters company last night you may guess that we spent the night very merrily in talking over old matters & ourtravels (sic) etc. etc. – he says he is pleased with the country & expects to move to it & also that you were coming this fall certain well now milt I shall look for you & impatiently await your arrival – now Milt for my sake & for your sake & for god sake & for every other sake wake up & shake the ashes of (sic) your feet & out of your hair and come to Texas where you can make a fortune with out work- or with it, as you please now is the time to come to Texas the country is fast settling up land is rising & trade runs high & every body animated with flattering prospects of future prosperity cotton is up the country is settling up land is rising the navigation of the sabine and trinity Rivers all tend to animate the Texian settlers-

I would not move back to Tennessee under any reasonable consideration whatever because I think Texas is destined to be one of the best farming countrys (sic) now west of blue Ridge- I am very sorry that brother Allen is not coming to this country because it would just suit him and I know that he would be well pleased- but A.L. I have not much faith in his coming shortly from the way he writes tell him if he goes to open a farm in owl hollow to go first & buy a constitution from a Jackass

Page 3
Tell Brother Jess I was much disappointed to hear that he was not coming to Texas this fall I recvd (sic) his letter a few days ago which informed that M.L Parks was
still knocking around with those old claims trying to collect well now I would just say that I am in hopes you will not let him chissle out of one single cent there is honestly not more than $25.00 cts. going to him except Rights note and that you have nothing to do with, and therefore if he does not settle honestly & justly let him alone he can not take the land off and it will be Redeemable in two years if sold any how or if he sells & bids it off himself do you turn round and have it sold as his property for the claims you have against him – nothing more at present – May success attend you & love purity & fidelity ever be your motto
Yours respectfully F.G. Parks
P.S. for A.P.
Dear cousin through the medium of this epistle I take pleasure in Remitting to you that love & respect that in days gone by existed between you & I though it is not now at this time so fully developed though… (rest of page is missing)

Page 4
Of that privelidge (sic) at times makes me feel quite sad and solitary but so it is & it cant tisser (sic) - about the first of July Joel Dodson & my self expect to start to western Texas to look at the country- I hope when this comes to hand you will sit down & give us aminate (sic) detail of every thing that is werth (sic) telling all about the galls… (rest of page is missing)
This source is a reminiscence. That means someone shared this personal story about their past after it happened. The writer of this reminiscence was Khebler Miller (K. M.) Van Zandt. Van Zandt was a lawyer, soldier, merchant, banker, and civic leader in Texas.

After looking around for some time for a good place to locate, my father made arrangements for us to move to Elysian Fields in what was then known as the Red River district and later became part of Harrison County. Pa made a trade with a man who owned a yoke of oxen and a good wagon to transport our family and household goods to our new home. Having no money, he gave the man some of our dining-room chairs. The driver was a very profane man and cursed and swore at his oxen until Pa grew disgusted and took his place. Ma said I noticed the difference right away and asked how Pa could make the oxen go when he didn’t talk like the other man did.

On our journey we had to cross a river at floodtime. Since the boat was not available, and it was not known whether the oxen could swim the stream while hitched to the wagon, my father decided to unload and made a raft out of some logs and parts of the wagon. Several trips were required to take the family, the household goods, and some chickens we had acquired at Camp Sabine across the river. Much to the dismay and disappointment of my parents, some chickens escaped. When morning came there were the chickens roosting on the coop from which they had escaped.

The house at Elysian Fields to which we moved was an unfinished, one-room log cabin covered with hand-hewn boards fastened on with weight poles. The door was hung with wooden hinges and had a latch inside. Glass windows were scarce then, but the builder of this house had by some means obtained a small window sash with panes of glass about six-by-eight inches in size, which he had placed by the side of the front door. The beds were built in the corners of the room by placing a post about six and one-half feet from one wall and five feet from the other and adding a side rail and footboard. The walls of the house made the headboard and one side of the bed. Rope and strips of rawhide laced across the frame of the bed served as springs.