Learning A–Z	level **Y**	Multi-level	N/A
Grade	5	Word Count	1,600
Lexile	990L	Fiction • Historical	

Refer to the Focus Question on page 2 of this title to guide discussion and support additional learning connected to the text.

Westward Journey is a charming story that gives insight into the perilous lives of the brave pioneers who left the safety and familiarity of home to find a better life in the West. After an especially frightening event, two youngsters, Jessie and Bessie, forge a friendship that they hope will make the long and demanding journey a little easier.

Learning A–Z

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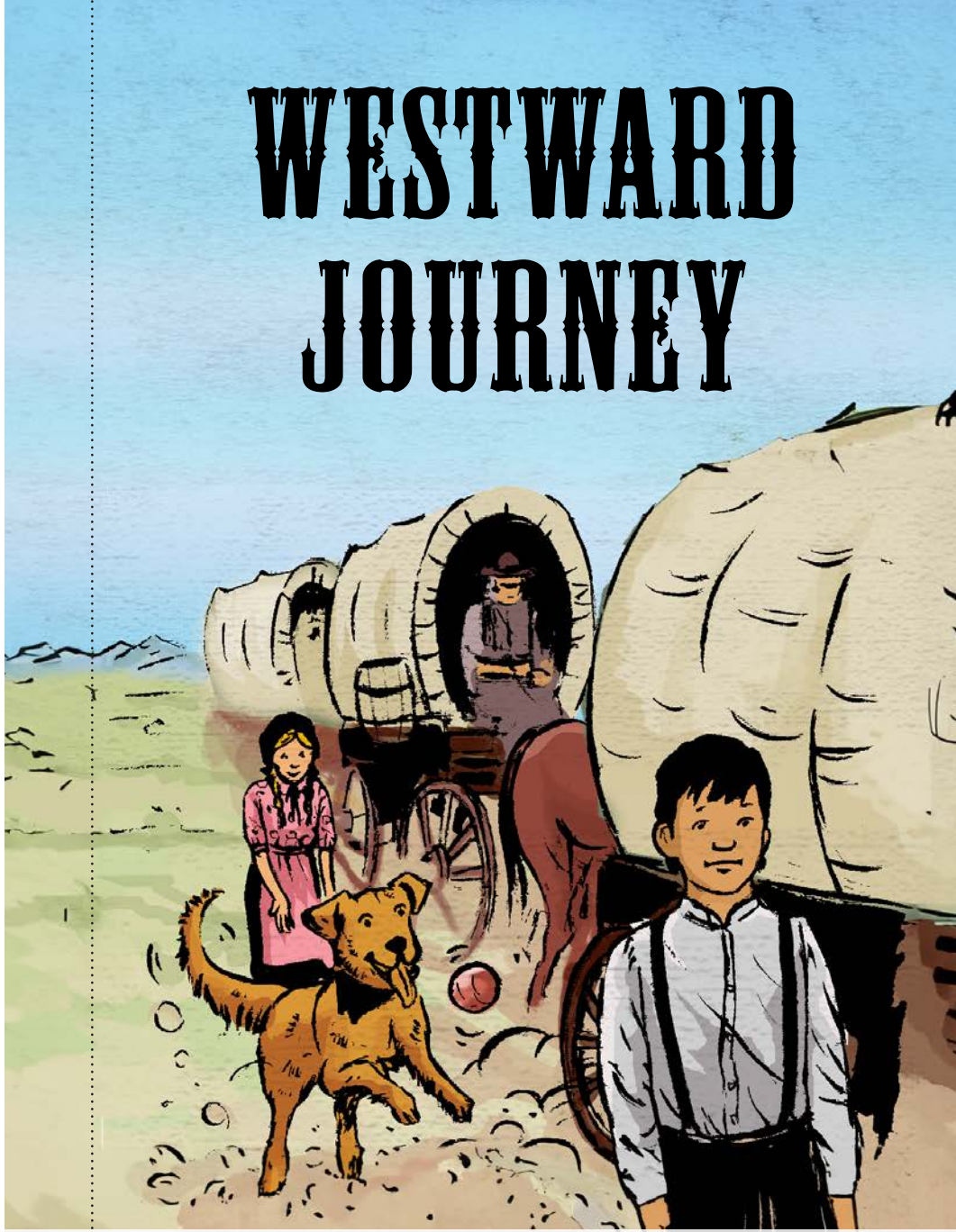
WESTWARD JOURNEY



Written by Jan Goldberg
Illustrated by Linda Pierce

Glossary

coaxed *(v.)* page 5
gently persuaded someone to do or say something

confined *(v.)* page 6
kept within certain limits or boundaries

content *(adj.)* page 14
happy or pleased

discourage *(v.)* page 12
to try to keep someone from doing something or keep something from happening

entertain *(v.)* page 7
to provide amusing or interesting material to a person or an audience

oblivious *(adj.)* page 10
completely unaware

prairie *(n.)* page 4
a wide, flat plain covered with grasses

protection *(n.)* page 10
defense from harm or danger

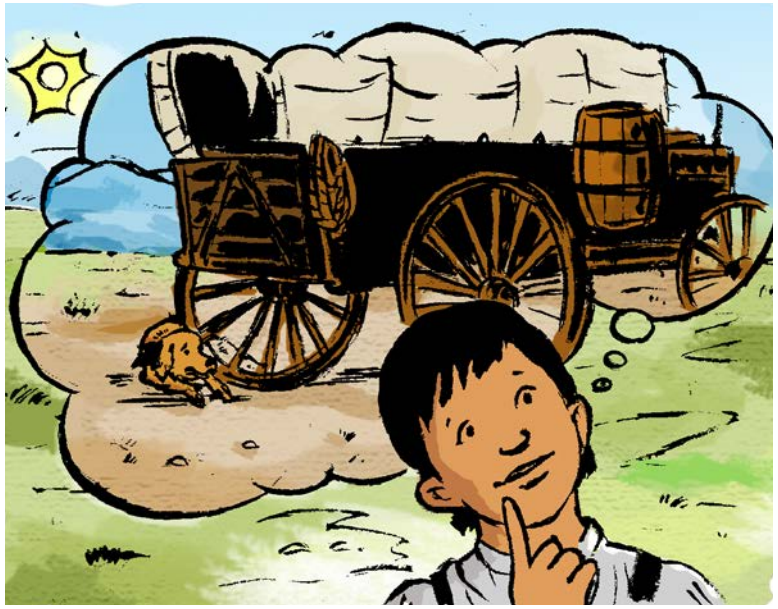
rambling *(v.)* page 8
walking around without a set destination

ruckus *(v.)* page 5
noisy, confused activity

severe *(adj.)* page 9
extremely harsh or unpleasant

stampede *(n.)* page 10
a sudden rush of cattle or other herd animals that panic and run at top speed as a group

WESTWARD JOURNEY



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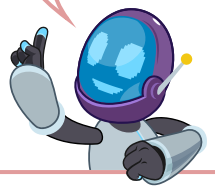
Focus Question

What role does Wag play in the development of this story?



Words to Know

coaxed	prairie
confined	protection
content	rambling
discourage	ruckus
entertain	severe
oblivious	stampede

Connections

Writing

This story takes place on the Oregon Trail. Research the Oregon Trail and write about where it led, how long the journey took, the challenges people faced, and why they made the journey.

Social Studies

Imagine you are preparing for a trip on the Oregon Trail. Plan your journey, including a timeline and a list of supplies.

"I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't saved Wag," said Bessie, serious once more.

"I know exactly how you feel," Jessie said, pausing to remember the friends he'd most likely never see again.

"When you're feeling better, how about the three of us play fetch together?" he asked tentatively.

"You bet," agreed Bessie, figuring that if Wag thought this boy was all right, she could give him a chance, too. Having another friend with whom to spend time might make the demanding journey ahead a little easier to take—for both of them.

Jessie explained that he'd found Wag hiding under his family's wagon just before the buffalo herd stormed past. Wag nearly bolted out into the herd, but Jessie was able to coax him into the wagon, where he was **content** to play tug-of-war with a section of old rope Jessie had.

Bessie scratched Wag behind his ears and looked warily at Jessie, who couldn't help but crack a giant grin as Wag started to lick every inch of Bessie's face.

Bessie couldn't help but giggle, which set Jessie to hooting. Wag happily swished his tail back and forth and nearly knocked Bessie over with his enthusiastic tongue bath.

1848, west of Independence, Missouri

How in all creation did I land here? thought eleven-year-old Jessie Townsend. The wheels of his family's covered wagon rolled over the uneven ruts that marked the beginning of a 2,000-mile wagon-train journey west. Oregon Country promised flowers that bloomed all year, free land ripe for farming, and rivers and streams overflowing with fish; but none of this bounty mattered to Jessie. His closest friends and favorite fishing hole remained in Ohio.

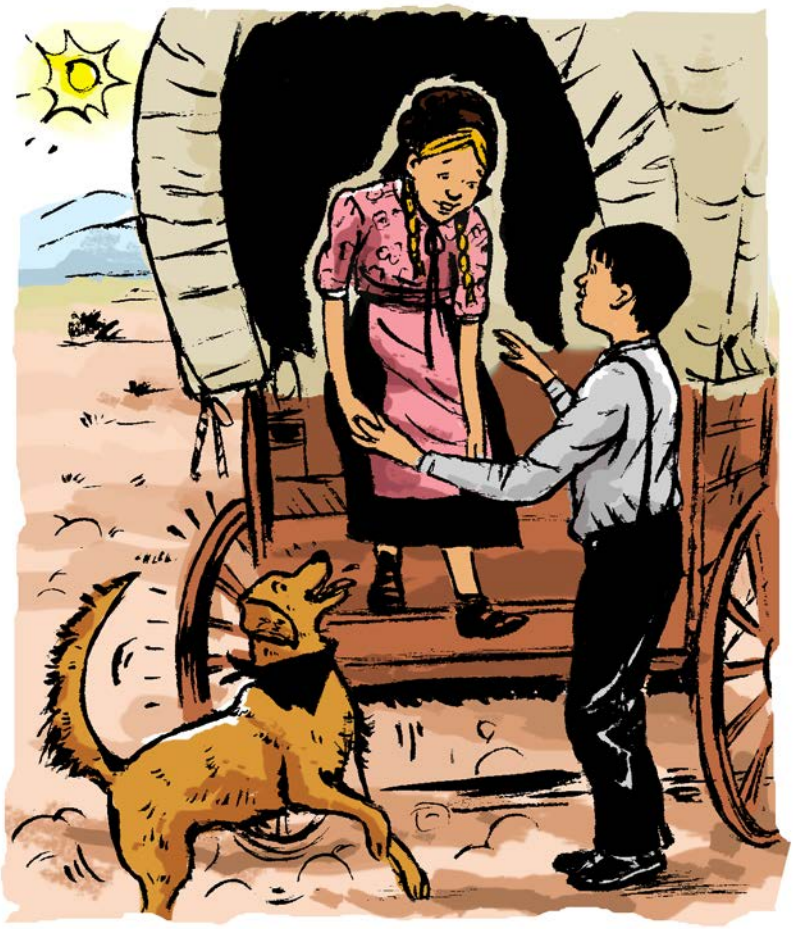
With a clenched jaw and downward-fixed eyes, Jessie jostled around—back and forth, up and down—on one of the 36 wagons slowly rolling west, and refused to see the beauty of the wide-open spaces. *Why did we ever leave Ohio?* he thought as he leaped down from the wagon. With slumping shoulders, he then grabbed a pebble from his shoe and forcefully flung it to the ground.

Huddled together inside the oxen-pulled wagon were Jessie's mother and eight-year-old sister. His mother and sister looked alike with their brightly-colored cotton dresses and bonnets that his mother had hand-sewn. Jessie and his father looked like mirror images in the grey cotton pants, grey shirts, and hats that Jessie's mother had also sewn. Jessie and his father routinely walked side by side during the 10 to 15 miles the wagon train travelled each day.

In the wagon following, another eleven-year-old—a blond-haired, blue-eyed girl named Bessie—noticed Jessie walking on the flat **prairie** beside his family's wagon. She thought he looked about her age and wondered whether he might be interested in playing with her and Wag.

"I think I have what you're looking for," said Jessie, who seemed to appear out of thin air with Wag trailing along behind him.

"Wag, boy, you're safe!" exclaimed Bessie as color returned to her cheeks for an instant, and she climbed down from the wagon despite her mother's protests.



When it was again quiet enough to hear the call of a bird, the pioneers felt it was safe to venture out. They moved their wagons back to their usual single-file line and began heading west once again. "Where's Wag?" asked a weak voice from inside the wagon.

"I don't know," said William. "I haven't seen him since before the buffalo stampede."

"Oh no, you don't suppose he got scared and ran off . . . do you?" asked Bessie.

"I don't know, Bessie, but I'm afraid that's very possible," answered her father.

"Well, I'm going to go search for him," she said with purpose.

"No, you're not. Your fever may have broken overnight, but you're far from well. I don't want you wandering about, getting dizzy again, and falling and hurting yourself or worse."

"I don't care about any of that. I only care about Wag. Please, you know I HAVE to find him. We can't leave him out here alone." Visions of Bessie's nightmare haunted her.

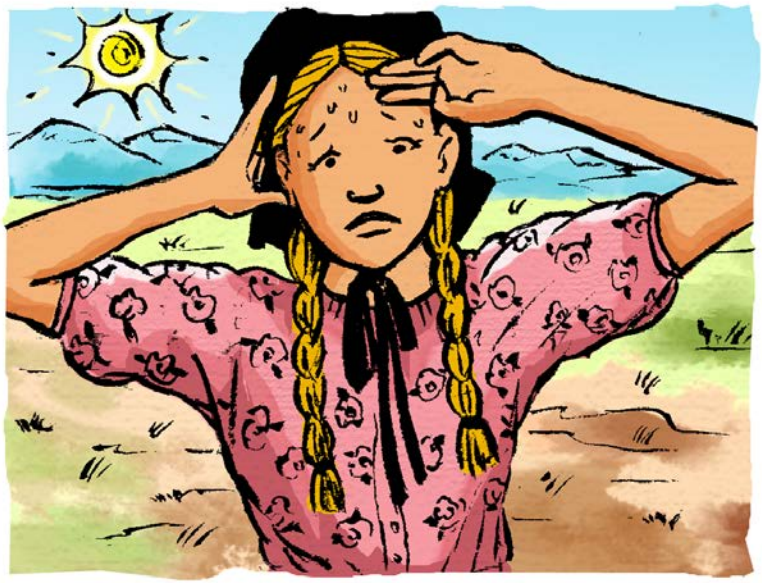
"We don't really have a choice," said her father sadly, wishing he'd done more to **discourage** his daughter from becoming so attached to an animal.

Bessie jumped down from the wagon and threw Wag's favorite ball into the high prairie grass in the general direction of the boy. "Come on, Wag," Bessie **coaxed**, "go fetch."

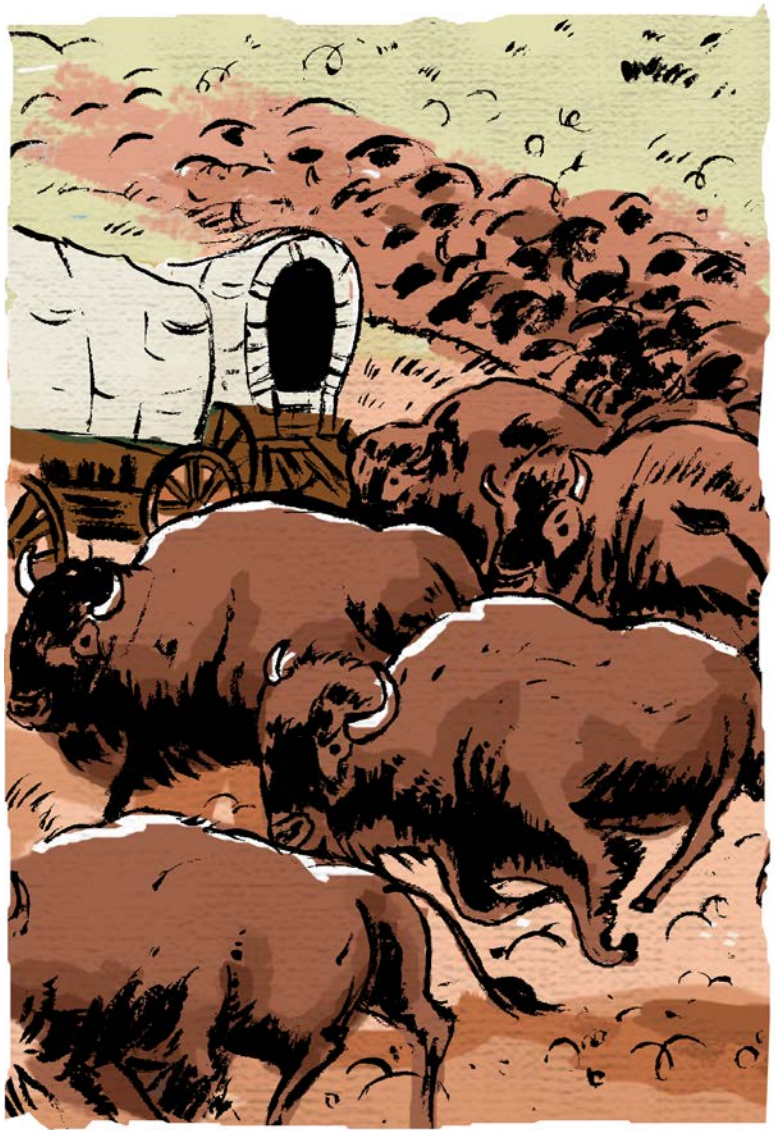
Wag, a four-year-old golden retriever, took off in an instant. He cavorted like a puppy as he sprang forward, hurtled toward the ball, retrieved it, and presented it back to Bessie before she could take more than one step. The boy ahead barely noticed the **ruckus** created by the energetic dog's mad dash for his toy. Bessie's attempt to snare the boy's attention had failed.

Maybe he doesn't care beans for dogs, Bessie thought. Then, Wag distracted her by nudging her hand and dropping the ball into it. Though Wag was a dog, he moved as quickly as a rabbit and could play for hours and hours and never tire. Bessie likened herself more to a tortoise than a hare and was always first to end their fetching games.

As Bessie walked beside the wagon a few days later, she began to feel dizzy, and the feeling worsened as the day grew longer. *Uh-oh, my stomach is doing flip-flops,* she thought. *And my head is beginning to feel like flour kneaded into pie dough.* Bessie didn't want to be treated like a baby and be **confined** to the wagon—so she hid her illness as long as possible.



held their breath as much as possible, and no one dared move outside the circle until the wagon train leader signaled that every single buffalo in the herd had passed by.



After a brief amount of restful sleep, Sarah and William had their team of oxen plodding along the trail when a thunderous boom echoed across the countryside.

"Hurry, circle the wagons," shouted the trail leader from a few wagons ahead. Bessie's parents hurried to do as they were told though their daughter was **oblivious** to the trouble heading in their direction. "Circle the wagons. Unwelcome company's about to charge past us. Round up the animals and the children. Make sure everyone and everything is accounted for. We don't have much time!"

Although he advised everyone not to panic, it was clear in listening to the voice of the wagon-train leader that he too was frightened. His warning traveled like wildfire throughout the train, and everyone scurried to direct their wagons into a circular pattern, placing the oxen in the center so the vital animals wouldn't **stampede.**

Just as the circle had barely been completed, a huge herd of enormous creatures with brown, shaggy coats rushed around it. Everyone inside the **protection** of the ring felt the earth shake as countless buffalo kicked up a blanket of dust that enveloped everything for hours. Everyone literally

At dinnertime, however, when the wagon train set up camp for the night, Bessie could no longer fake feeling well. When her mother, Sarah, caught a glimpse of her in the firelight, she immediately felt Bessie's forehead and realized that her daughter was burning up with fever.

"Go lie down, Bessie," Sarah ordered. "I'll bring you a cupful of bitters to drink. I want you lying on that mattress until you're feeling better."

"Yes, ma'am, but what about my responsibilities to Wag? Who will take care of him?"

"I'll feed him and give him water," Sarah said.

"Yes, but who will **entertain** him? He's used to me playing with him every day."

"I'm sorry, Bessie, but none of us has the time to watch him or play with him," said her father, William. "Don't worry. He'll be fine."

That night, Bessie slept fitfully as her fever climbed ever higher. Plaguing her sleep were nightmares of Wag being lonely, wandering the vast prairie, and searching for her from far behind the wagon train.

Two mornings later as the wagon train prepared to break camp, Jessie walked up to Bessie's father.

"Uh, pardon me, sir, where is the little girl who plays with the dog? Is she in good health?"

"I'm afraid our daughter is ill with fever, so she's abed inside the wagon."

"Oh, sorry," said Jessie apologetically, knowing others in the wagon train were suffering from a similar affliction. "Where's her dog?" he asked.

"He sleeps next to her most of the day," answered Bessie's father.

"I mean no disrespect, but is he getting any exercise?" Jessie asked. "Is anyone paying attention to him when he's **rambling** around?"

"We're too busy to worry about that, I'm afraid," said Sarah as she reloaded the breakfast supplies.

"Well, maybe I could come by and tend to his exercise each day," offered Jessie, "at least until your daughter is feeling better."

"Well, that would be very kind of you," said Sarah. "Bessie would truly appreciate your taking an interest in Wag."

"Oh, it's no trouble, ma'am," said Jessie. "I'll come back later this afternoon to tend to him."

That night, Bessie's illness became as **severe** as her parents had ever seen. Chills shook Bessie's body as Sarah spoon-fed her all the medicine they had to make her well. It seemed as though nothing improved her condition. Earlier that morning, an elderly woman had died from sickness.

Sarah could not bear the thought of losing her child. Bessie awoke delirious several times in the night but didn't notice her mother's tear-stained cheeks. About an hour before dawn, Bessie's fever broke. Sarah's shoulders shook as she wept with joy, and William comforted her.