

NON-FICTION BOOK CLUB

August 2016 Selection

***The Oregon Trail* by Rinker Buck**

Traveling from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Baker City, Oregon, over the course of four months, Buck is accompanied by three cantankerous mules, his boisterous brother, Nick, and a Jack Russell terrier named Olive Oyl. Along the way, they dodge thunderstorms in Nebraska, chase runaway mules across the Wyoming plains, cross the Rockies, and make desperate fifty-mile forced marches for water. The Buck brothers repair so many broken wheels and axels that they nearly reinvent the art of wagon travel itself. They also must reckon with the ghost of their father, an eccentric yet loveable dreamer whose memory inspired their journey across the plains and whose premature death, many years earlier, has haunted them both ever since

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Discussion Questions:

1. What did you know about the Oregon Trail before reading the book? How did your impression of it change after the last page?
2. Animals play a central role during the journey and may even be considered “scene stealers” throughout the book. How would you characterize the various animals that join Rinker and Nick? Besides their labor, what else did the mules provide along the way?



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3. What was the role of pioneer women like Narcissa Whitman in the Great Migration? Why do you think they have been largely left out of the earlier Oregon Trail narrative?
4. As they travel, Rinker and Nick observe a number of sociological and cultural differences in the towns and regions they pass through. What, in your opinion, was the most unexpected or interesting anecdote about people or places?
5. Although many Western narratives depict Native Americans as a threat, they were in fact quite helpful to settlers and wagon trainers. Why do you think the negative stories emerged and prevailed as history went on?
6. Many of the pioneer families embarked upon the trail seeking new life with little idea of what actually awaited them at journey's end. Do you think you could ever uproot your family without any guarantees about your new life and surroundings?
7. Rinker and Nick have two very different personalities, and they shine through as they travel the trail. Who would you rather be on a covered wagon with? What strengths do you think they each brought to their trip?
8. The memory of the brothers' father looms over the journey. How do their memories and grieving play out during the trip?
9. How would you categorize *The Oregon Trail* – history, travelogue, brotherly bonding, memoir? A combination?
10. What other great American journeys would you like to see Rinker embark upon?



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Recommendations:

- If you liked *The Oregon Trail*, you might like *A Walk in the Woods* (<http://www.booksamillion.com/p/9780767902526>)
- If you liked *A Walk in the Woods*, you might also enjoy *Pirate Hunters* (<http://www.booksamillion.com/p/9780812973693>)