connected the Upper Mississippi with the Pacific Ocean, to map the region they explored, to establish contact with the Native Americans in the area, and to take notes about and collect specimens of the plants, animals, and minerals they found. These would be sent to Washington for further study. The Corps discovered that the Rockies stood in the way of an all-water route to the Pacific. The expedition did, however, establish official relations with many Native Americans bands. The most valuable information brought back from the expedition was the notes, drawings, and specimens that documented the trip. The Lewis and Clark expedition stimulated interest in the West and brought thousands of settlers into the territory.

**Sacagawea**

Sacagawea was a young Shoshone woman who was the wife of a French Canadian trader, Toussaint Charbonneau. She had been kidnapped as a child by another tribe, the Hidatsa, and sold to a Mandan who later traded her to Charbonneau. Charbonneau signed on with Lewis and Clark as an interpreter and guide during the winter of 1805 to 1806, along with his wife Sacagawea and her baby. She proved to be of great help in enlisting the aid of Native Americans when the Corps reached the Upper Missouri River. In late summer, the Corps crossed paths with Sacagawea’s band, the Shoshone, and her brother Cameahwait. Sacagawea persuaded the Shoshone to provide horses for the expedition and to guide the Corps through the mountains of Idaho.

**Zebulon Pike and Pikes Peak**

Lewis and Clark were not the only explorers that President Jefferson commissioned. From 1805 to 1806, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike was sent to explore the sources of the Mississippi, Red, and Arkansas Rivers. When his expedition reached Colorado, they attempted to climb the mountain (Pikes Peak) that was later named after him. Pike and his men moved south into New Mexico and were taken prisoner by the Spanish. They were returned to the United States, bringing with them much important information about the Spanish territory.

**“Mountain Men” and the Fur Trade**

“Mountain Men” was the name given to trappers who were lured west by the profits of the fur trade. They moved into Oregon Country, the huge, barely charted area beyond the Rockies, where the forests and mountains were home to beaver and other fur-bearing animals. These men opened the way for later settlers. Today, this area includes the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, parts of the states of Wyoming and Montana, and southwestern Canada.

The fur trade was an important industry in the first 200 years of European settlement in North America. The French and their Indian allies had dominated the trade in the old Northwest Territory. The trade attracted adventurous frontiersmen who trapped beaver and traded with the Native Americans.

At first, the British had a monopoly on the fur trade in Oregon Country, but by the 1820s, U.S. companies were competing for the enormous profits to be made from the fur trade. Originally the British and the Americans set up trading posts where Native Americans and a few non-Native American trappers would come to sell or barter their furs. Then two U.S. businessmen hit upon the idea of an annual rendezvous, or fair, where Native Americans and trappers could bring their furs and sell them to traders for guns, knives, whiskey, cloth, and similar trade goods.
I. Westward Expansion

Teaching Idea
Students may enjoy learning about the exploits of one or more of the mountain men. Some interesting characters for further study include Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger, and James Beckwourth. A web search for these names, or for “mountain men,” will turn up many resources.

The rendezvous took place at a designated site in Wyoming. From the 1820s until the late 1830s, beaver was the most important trade commodity. Beaver hats were in style in the East and in Europe. By the late 1830s, however, styles had changed and the beaver had all but disappeared due to overtrapping. The life of the mountain man was ending.

But by then the mountain men had gained a reputation as wild and colorful characters. To Easterners, they were romantic figures, dressed in buckskin, with long hair, roaming the forests at will and answering to no man. But the life of mountain men was hard. They lived off the land, finding food where they could—animals, plants, nuts. In the spring, summer, and fall, they hunted and trapped on their own, but they often wintered in Native American villages. If a trapper fell and broke a leg, was mauled by a bear, or slipped and fell into a river, he could die. No one would know because he was alone in the forests.

Pioneers

Flatboats and Steamboats

Both native-born Americans and immigrants (who began to come in greater numbers after 1820) wanted to make a better life for themselves. But in the early 1800s, the coastal plain was becoming crowded, there was little land left to buy, and there were a limited number of jobs. To own land and to make a living, people were forced to move to less settled areas.

The first people to move into the land beyond the mountains traveled either down the rivers or overland through the valleys and gaps between mountains. Going downstream was the easiest way to travel, and people used canoes, rafts, and flatboats to carry passengers and freight. Overland, people used wagons and pack animals to carry them along dirt roads and mountain trails—both of which were little more than tracks that became muddy in the rainy season and treacherously rutted in the winter.

The transportation revolution of the early 1800s greatly spurred the movement of people inland. In the 1760s, James Watt of Scotland invented the first practical steam engine. In 1807, Robert Fulton used a steam engine to power his boat, the Clermont, up the Hudson River from New York to Albany. He covered the 150 miles in 32 hours, averaging a little under 5 miles per hour—slow by modern standards, but much faster than a canoe or flatboat could have covered the same distance. His was the first commercially successful steamboat company. By 1811, the steamboat New Orleans was plying up and down the Mississippi, carrying passengers and freight. Steamboats, being fast and large, could carry many passengers and much cargo. They could also navigate upstream against the current.

The steamboat helped ignite the transportation revolution, but without canals, its ability to travel the inland waterways would have been severely hampered. The canal era began in 1825 when the Erie Canal was opened. The canals were the best routes of transportation available, especially for heavy, bulky cargoes, such as coal, timber, and stone. In the 1850s, there was a boom in railroad building, offering faster, longer distance travel than steamboats. Still, many passengers found travel by canal boat smoother, less tiring, and less dangerous than land travel.

Wagon Trains

Before the transcontinental railroads and regional rail lines were built, linking all parts of the country, people went west by wagon. The wagons, called
prairie schooners, were small, four-wheeled vehicles with canvas tops and wooden bodies. They were light enough so that they would not sink easily into the soft prairie sod. Teams of oxen, rather than horses, often pulled the wagons. Horses were faster but not as strong or hardy as oxen.

Some pioneers, including women, traveled west alone. Others traveled in small groups, either on foot or on horseback. The most common arrangement was for several families to travel together in an organized wagon train. An experienced leader, or an elected head assisted by guides, would take command of the group.

### Land Routes: Santa Fe Trail and Oregon Trail

Between 1840 and 1860, more than 250,000 people went west. Most settlers went to the Oregon Territory and California. The most famous route was the Oregon Trail, which began in Independence, Missouri, and crossed 2,000 miles of plains, mountains, and rivers. In southern Idaho, the trail diverged. Those wanting to go to California followed the California Trail through northern Nevada into California’s Sacramento Valley. The ruts cut by thousands of wagon wheels can still be seen along parts of the Oregon Trail.

The even older Santa Fe Trail went from Independence, Missouri, to the former Spanish capital of Santa Fe. It was first used in 1821 and continued as a major trade route until 1880, when a railroad line was opened. The trail was relatively short—780 miles—on open plains across Kansas and up the Arkansas River or across the desert. The Santa Fe Trail, unlike the Oregon Trail, was basically a trade route.

### Mormons: Brigham Young, Salt Lake City

The Mormons are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The church was founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, who claimed to have received revelations from God on golden tablets. The teachings, known as the Book of Mormon, became the basis of the Mormon faith. Mormons believe the Bible and the Book of Mormon are the “Word of God” and that the president of the church is a prophet of God. One of their most publicized practices was the practice of polygamy, having more than one spouse at a time.

Smith and his followers moved from their original home in New York State to Ohio because they were attacked for their religious beliefs. After again being persecuted, they moved to Missouri, but controversy and resistance followed them and they were forced to move a third time. In 1844, after settling in Nauvoo, Illinois, conflict again broke out and Smith was killed. Under the leadership of Brigham Young in 1847, the Mormons moved far west to the Great Salt Lake Basin in what is now Utah. At the time, the area was part of Mexico.

Considered unsuitable for agriculture, the area was passed over by other pioneers, but the Mormons irrigated the desert and established farms. They built a prosperous community and in 1849, after the Mexican-American War, they formed the state of Deseret with Young as governor. The same year, the people of Deseret petitioned the United States Congress for admission as a state. Congress, however, was in the midst of the controversy over whether to allow the spread of slavery into the territories and denied the request (see “The Civil War: Causes, Conflicts, and Consequences,” on pp. 264–296). Congress also had a problem with the Mormon practice of polygamy. The following year, the Compromise of 1850 was worked out and Deseret was recognized as the Utah Territory. However, Utah did not become a state until 1896, after the Mormons had banned polygamy.