Revised 8/18/2026

Title: What Would You Bring?

Grade Level: Grades 3-8

Subject(s): Social Studies/Montana State History

Duration: One Fifty-Minute Class Period

Description: This Google slideshow lesson complements, but does not duplicate, information presented in Chapter 6: "Montana's Gold and Silver Boom" from the textbook *Montana: Stories of the Land* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2008) as well as the material in the hands-on history footlocker "Gold, Silver, and Coal Oh My!: Mining Montana's Wealth." (Find out more about these resources at MTHS Education.)

Goals: Student will learn about what life was like (especially for women and children) in early mining camps.

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Recognize that travel by wagon and steamboat meant that people could not bring everything they wanted with them to Montana Territory.
- Understand how material culture (artifacts) can teach us about life in the past.
- Describe some of the objects earlier settlers brought with them to Montana Territory and how they were used.

Content Standards Addressed:

- **SS.H.4.3.** Explain how Montana has changed over time given its cultural diversity and how this history impacts the present.
- **SS.H.6-8.5.** Explain how Montana has changed over time and how this history impacts the present.

Materials:

- Google Slideshow (which you can download from the following link: Google Slides Presentation) and script, below.
- Computer and projector

Procedure:

- Print either the script or script with accompanying slides.
- Review the script and slideshow before presenting. (Find script below).
- Before beginning the presentation, engage your class with the introductory exercise. Then present the Google Slideshow.
- After the presentation, have students "write their way out" and/or have a class discussion.

Introductory Exercise—Write your way in (5 minutes):

Have students pull out a piece of paper and a pen or pencil.

Ask students to imagine that their family was moving very far away and that they could only take what could fit in a small truck. There were no furniture stores where they were moving, so they needed to take everything they needed.

Tell them, that on the word go, they are go they are going to write non-stop for two minutes. Let them know that they don't need to worry about spelling or punctuation, and that even if they run out of things to write about, they should keep writing until the timer goes off. If they can't think of anything to write, they should write "I'm thinking, I'm thinking" until they come up with something to say. Build a sense of urgency.

Then ask them to write about what they would take to their new home.

After two minutes are up, allow a few minutes for students to share some of their answers. Then tell them that this was the same problem people moving to the Montana gold fields faced in the early 1860s and that you are going to show them some of what families brought with them to start their new lives here.

Show the Google Slideshow.

Write Your Way Out (optional, for upper grades, 3 minutes):

Ask students to write for three minutes, following the same procedure outlined above for Write Your Way In, but using the following questions:

- What did you learn from looking at these objects that you didn't know?

- What surprised you about what the families brought with them?

Discuss as a class: What surprised you about what the families brought? What objects did they have that we don't use today? What do we use instead?

Power Point Script

Note: The first seven slides provide background information about Pioneer Cabin and travel to Helena in the 1860s. The Pioneer Cabin (212 South Park Avenue, Helena) is now a museum managed by the Montana Heritage Commission. For more information call 406-843-5247.

1. Families that came to Montana Territory had long, difficult journeys and parents had a lot to worry about. Keeping their children healthy, making sure they had enough to eat, and keeping them safe were big concerns. The trip west took careful planning. There was room for only things that were necessary. Whether traveling by steamboat or by covered wagon, it was important to think ahead and carefully plan what to pack. Many families came to Helena in 1865. This is how the town looked. The bare hill in the center is where the fire tower would later be built.

2. A visit to the **Pioneer Cabin** in Helena is a good way to experience what is was like to live in a log cabin in remote Montana. Built at the time of the gold rushes to Montana in 1864 and 1865, the cabin is now a museum filled with things that Montana pioneers brought west. The Pioneer Cabin is really two cabins joined together. Originally, they were two separate houses.

3. The back part was built first. **Wilson Butts** was a bachelor from Missouri who came to Last Chance Gulch—the original name for Helena—to seek his fortune. He staked a claim here in the summer of 1864 and spent the winter mining the stream that ran through his claim. Look carefully at the photo. You can see from the ground-in dirt that Wilson has the hands of a miner. In the spring of 1865, he sent for his brother to join him.

4. **Jonas and Louanna Butts** arrived with their three daughters, Derinda Jane, Arminda Ellen, and Sara Anne—ages 14, 10 and 7. The family built the cabin's front room.

5. When the Butts family arrived in 1865, **Helena's main street** looked like this. False fronts covered log buildings and the dirt streets were dusty and flooded when it rained. Helena was a busy place and when the freight wagons, pictured here, arrived, it was a great event. Freighters brought everything you can image from pianos and building supplies to candy to sell in the stores.

6. The Butts family lived in the two cabins for several years. The cabins were eventually connected to form one home and several other families lived there during the 1870s. **George**

Mitchell, pictured in the wagon, was a bachelor who lived in the cabin the longest, from 1903 until his death in 1937.

7. After that, citizens cleaned up **the cabin and the house next door**. They gathered donations from the families of Helena pioneers and created the present museum. They hired a caretaker to live next to the cabin. Although a caretaker no longer lives there, it is still called "the Caretaker's House."

8. It's interesting to look at all the things inside the two-room Pioneer Cabin because they teach us what people valued 150 years ago and what they brought with them when they came west. A **cookstove** was one important luxury. While you could cook on an open fire—and Jonas did cook on an open hearth when he first lived in the cabin—a cookstove made mealtime much easier. This stove has a side oven and four top burners and comes completely apart. The parts fit neatly in a box for packing in a covered wagon.

9. A cast-iron **pancake griddle** made pancakes all the same size.

10. You could cook eggs or bacon on the plain side of the **griddle** at the same time.

11. A heavy **cast iron cornbread or biscuit pan** was an essential kitchen tool.

12. Louanna Butts brought a cow with her from Missouri. There were very few cows in Montana Territory in 1865. The cow wore a **bell** like this one so that she could always tell where the cow was. Louanna was famous for her butter and sold many pounds of it to the miners in Last Chance Gulch. She packed the butter in salt and kept it cool in crocks in an underground cellar.

13. One essential tool was a **coffee grinder**. This could be used to grind more than coffee. People grew wheat in Montana before there were flour mills in Montana. Families ground the wheat into flour by hand using a coffee mill.

14. A wicker-covered bottle like this one is called a **demijohn.** It was used to store wine and spirits. The wicker kept the bottles from clanking together and breaking. Until there were laws against child labor, children in large cities from poor families or orphanages were often put to work weaving wicker for bottle coverings. It was hard work for children as young as six.

15. **Gold pans** were an essential tool for placer miners.

16. Oxen were large cattle bred for heavy work. A pair of oxen wore a **yoke** like this over their shoulders when pulling covered wagons carrying families west, and hauling wagons filled with heavy freight. Farmers also used yoked pairs of oxen to plow the fields.

17. You can see the circular part, called an **ox bow**, that went around their necks and attached to the yoke.

18. Often people made chairs and pieces of furniture from what they had on hand. A creative pioneer made this **chair** with an ox bow for its back and a worn-out cutting board for its seat.

19. Often people wanted to bring special pieces of furniture with them. But wagons were sometimes too heavily packed. Loads had to be lightened during dangerous river crossings and traveling up steep hills. Many a fine chest, bedstead, or cabinet had to be discarded and left on the side of the trail. Two pieces that survived the journey west are shown here against the walls. The **china cupboard and pie safe** were found in the cabin and may have been brought west by the Butts family or other early residents.

20. The **pie safe** dates to about 1864. It has punched tin panels that allowed air to circulate but kept mice and flies away from bread and pies stored inside. That's why it was called a "pie safe."

21. Most settlers did not bathe very often because they did not believe it was healthy and because it was a great deal of trouble to heat large amounts of water on their small cookstoves. This Civil War-era **hat bathtub** –so named because it looks like an upside-down hat—has a place to sit and a place to put your soap so it does not fall into the water. Unless you were a small child, you would only put your feet into the water. Since baths usually took place in the kitchen near the stove's warmth, the tub has a large rim to prevent water splashing on the floor.

22. The Butts family did their cooking in the back room which also served as the **dining room** and as the bedroom for Jonas's bachelor brother Wilson.

23. Many men of the period had bushy beards and mustaches. In the company of ladies, when men drank tea or coffee, it was embarrassing to get one's whiskers wet. A **mustache cup** kept whiskers dry.

24. Illustration of mustache cup.

25. Girls played with dolls just like kids do today and when they packed their trunks for the move west, they could bring only special things with them. These **doll dishes** were likely

cherished. One set is wooden and one set is pewter. On the bottom shelf there are several tin molds, a tin box, and one other interesting item, just left of center.

26. This is a doll-size **fluting iron**. You would heat it on the stove and place fabric on the base, then fit the top piece into the bottom. It would then iron tiny pleats into the fabric.

27. **Ladies' fashions** of the times had many ruffles and pleats made with a fluting iron.

28. Ironing was a necessary chore and a heavy **sad-iron**, heated on the stove, did the job. The term "sad-iron" has nothing to do with being sad. Rather the word "sad" in Middle English means "solid" and the term continued to be used through the 1800s. The irons were very heavy and made of solid metal so that they could hold the heat for a long time.

29. Transportation in early Helena was limited to wagons, carriages, and horseback. Most children learned to ride horses but girls—since they wore only dresses, never wore pants or jeans like we do today—usually learned to ride a **side saddle**. That was considered the only ladylike way to ride a horse. Side saddles were sometimes beautifully embroidered like this one. Instead of a regular centered saddle horn, the horn was split into an upper and lower piece, located off-center to the side.

30. **This illustration** shows how to sit on a side saddle. You placed one leg over the top of the horn, or pommel, and the other underneath the second lower piece.

31. Side saddles allowed women to show off their beautiful, full skirts.

32. Horses weren't the only animal you could ride side saddle!

33. The **front room of the cabin**—remember this was originally a separate house—was where the family of five—mom, dad, and three daughters—lived for several years. Notice the white walls. During spring cleaning, one of the main chores was whitewashing the walls. Whitewash was made from powdered limestone mixed with water. Lime was made from limestone quarried in the hills and then cooked in the lime kilns down at the end of West Main Street. Whitewashing was necessary every spring because after a winter of burning wood to keep warm, the walls became black with soot.

34. We saw the cookstove in the back room. Here is a **wood stove** used for warmth. When the family first arrived, they used a fireplace, but hardware stores soon had stoves like this one to buy. They were much safer than an open hearth and kept the room reasonably warm.

35. A **rocking chair** was the most important piece of furniture for a woman with children because that is how she put her babies to sleep. But rocking chairs took up a lot of space in a

covered wagon and so sometimes the rockers were cut off so that other things could be packed around the chair. Shortening the rockers didn't stop the chair from rocking.

36. Louis and Theresa Henry were the third family to live in the cabins. Theresa came west on the steamship *Mountaineer* in 1869. She brought this tiny**, hand-operated sewing machine** and it was one of the first in Last Chance Gulch. Neighbors often borrowed it to make clothing for themselves and their children.

37. A **sock darner** was part of every woman's sewing basket. Darning, or mending socks, was an important task. The egg shape fit into the toe of the sock to make sewing holes easier and the mending smoother, thus preventing painful blisters.

38. Candles usually were the main source of light on the frontier. A **kerosene lamp** might be lit for a special occasion. Until there were stores in Last Chance Gulch, kerosene was hard to come by, and it was not something easily brought in large amounts in covered wagons. The lower part of the lantern held the liquid kerosene. To light the lamp, you took off the glass chimney, then lit the wick with a match. The dial on the side adjusted the size of the flame. Once the wick was lit, the chimney was replaced and the lamp would adequately light a small room.

39. Although this **kerosene chandelier** may look out of place in a log cabin, remember that western travelers brought the things with them that meant the most and that were functional. Cabins were never intended as permanent housing. Families always meant to move on, and they used what they brought until then.

40. The child who wore these **baby shoes** probably took his or her first steps in them, perhaps right here in the cabin. Workers stabilizing the cabin found them buried in the foundation.

41. We know from the Butts family's recollections that Louanna and Jonas slept in the main bed. Derinda Jane, Arminda Ellen, and Sarah Anne slept together in a trundle bed that pulled out from underneath their parents' bed. All cabins were equipped with at least one chamber pot. There was no plumbing, just an outhouse in the back. During bad weather, the **chamber pot** substituted. In the morning, the girls likely had to take turns dumping the contents. It was probably the most hated chore of all.

42. Families created their own fun during long winters and other times when they were confined to the cabin. A **stereoscope** was one form of amusement. Can you guess how this was used?

43. Stereoscopes had many interchangeable cards. The **cards**, printed with a double image, appeared in 3-D when you looked through the lenses.

44. Every pioneer home had a **wash bowl and pitcher**. Sometimes there were additional matching pieces like a shaving mug, a toothbrush holder, or a water glass. The cabin had no running water and so the pitcher would usually be filled the night before for washing up in the morning.

45. Women did crafts, especially needlework. Beginning in the late 1860s, communities hosted territorial fairs, like the county fairs we have today. Women entered their handiwork. A **footstool with buffalo horn legs** was one popular item that offered a perfect canvas for needlework.

46. This footstool, by Augusta Kohrs on display at the Grant Kohrs Ranch near Deer Lodge, shows what beautiful pieces some women created.

47. An **embroidered picture** added culture and beauty to plain cabin walls.

48. Guns were important for protection in the wilderness and for hunting game for food. Gunpowder was precious and had to be kept dry or it was of no use. A Rocky Mountain sheep's horn, hollow and absolutely water-tight, was the **perfect powder horn**. It once had a piece of leather laced with a thong that covered the top.

49. Travel was so difficult and "home" so far away that families moving west faced the real possibility that that they would not see their parents, siblings, or other family members again. As we might do today, they treasured family photographs. A **family album** kept memories alive…

50. … by preserving **pictures of loved ones** living far away.

51. Another way to remember family members was to clip locks of their hair. When locks from many different people were collected, a **human hair wreath** or picture like this could be made in remembrance of those who had died or were far away.

52. It was a common practice to make **jewelry out of human hair**, too. These are some other examples not from the cabin.

53. Fire was the greatest danger in mining camps like Helena. Miners were not always careful with their cooking fires and candles. If one cabin caught on fire, the fire quickly spread to other wooden cabins. It was like knocking over a row of dominoes. Large sections of the community burned many different times. Every cabin had a bucket of sand hanging outside in case of fire to try to put the fire out.

54. Occasionally workers and tour guides at the Pioneer Cabin come across **broken pieces of dishes, or bottles, or even marbles.** Those little treasures are kept in the cabin where they once had been used by the people who lived here.