

# The orgen trail essay sample

[Education](#)



In literature, history, and present day life. Regardless of the frequency of these subjects instructors are often hesitant to embark upon discussing them during instruction. Despite apprehensions to discuss these controversial topics they shape events and society, and should be incorporated in a student's education. In fact by not examining these topics students are being done a grave disservice. Exploring these troublesome topics and even questioning why they may not be spoken about or how they influence society cause students to gain vital knowledge and become less ignorant. The Oregon Trails may be considered by some to be a tool to aide students in becoming more knowledgeable on diverse topics. It has been called a "multiethnic" interactive computer game that allows students to travel along the trail and gain insight on the life of a person traveling to the Oregon Territory (Bigelow, 2009, p. 317). This game has been put on a pedestal by critics and has been awarded five stars by the Pride's Guide to Educational Software for being "a wholesome, absorbing historical simulation" (Bigelow, 2009, p. 317).

The outstanding critiques of this software creates an appealing route for many teachers to take in order to incorporate an engaging activity that abides by state and school curriculum standards. However what the critics do not inform teachers is this educational game is in reality spoon feeding students a dishonest account of history. The game takes on the white males view and neglects to account for gender and cultural biases that occur during this time period (Bigelow, 2009, p. 319). By not pointing out the societal issues that occurred during this time period, students are really being done a disservice. There is no reason why instructors have to keep the

fact that racism against minority groups and gender groups occurred, and still do. As Bigelow (2009) stated, “ Just as we would not invite a stranger into our classrooms and then leave the room, teachers need to become aware of the political perspectives of CD-ROMs and need to equip students to “ read” them critically”(p. 318). Instructors should point out the data deceptions within The Oregon Trails to aide students in gaining a stronger sociological eye to examine historical accounts and society as a whole.

Teachers should have students approach the game and question why social groups are missing from the game, why they are perceived the way they, are and how these social groups may influence society or change the game. In addition the teacher can then go on to draw connections to how society still minimizes minority and gender groups and creates stereotypes. Instruction like this creates a less ignorant and more accepting classroom of learners that can go out into society and spread their well informed wisdom. Recently I noticed a classroom where a critical review, like the one described, was desperately needed. I observed students working on a Native American project and they were supposed to create a poem regarding Pocahontus. I would estimate that 90% of the class drew inspiration from the Disney film to base their understanding off of and used images from the film. The accuracy of this film, as Pewwardy (2009) addresses, is an abomination toward student’s learning of Native American history and culture (p. 61). Rather than use this film as a tool to build on understanding instructors should use it to portray the racism that occurs within the Disney version as well as the stereotypes and misconceptions that both this film and society hold in regards to Native Americans. Students can examine the white supremacy

that occurs within the film and use it to apply to what really occurred in history and relate it to present events.

Therefore the concept of critically reviewing educational material that Bigelow (2009) brings attention to does not solely pertain to CD-ROMs (p. 317-334). Instructors should have students ask the critical questions constantly and consistently, even when subjects may be found controversial. Some may find that examining both *The Oregon trails* and *Pocahontus* in such an open and critical way is controversial because it opens students up to examining deep corrupted subjects. However students should be examining controversial topics at every age, it creates a more open and honest educational environment. For instance death is a topic that elicits apprehension when instructors are faced with discussing it with students. Despite the fears of tackling this topic, Kate Lyman's 3rd grade class exhibited how a controversial topic can be worked into the classroom.

When a spider dawned itself upon Lyman's classroom students were able to learn about the lifecycle of a spider and appreciated the life and death of their beloved classroom pet (Lyman, 2003). Students were engaged in learning about the spider and were understanding and open to death because of the honest education they received from Lyman. The teacher could have very well made up a lie about how the spider disappeared but rather she addressed a common life occurrence, in which fit into her curriculum and allowed the class to entertain an idea that is often kept hushed. Therefore the method of critical reviewing can and should be applied to all aspects of classroom instruction. Teachers should insure that students approach topics critically and honestly, asking questions even if

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they are controversial. Students should question why minorities are neglected or stereotyped, and why their spider is dying, rather than neglect things that occur on a daily basis. Through this type of educational experience learners not only obtain knowledge they obtain character that will stay with them their whole life. This character allows them to view life in an honest way and question occurrences rather than stick with what they are told.