California Connections

Sarah's Spring

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Illustrated by Chuck Lockhart

California Education and the Environment Initiative
Science Standards 2.3.a. and 2.3.b

Sarah's Spring

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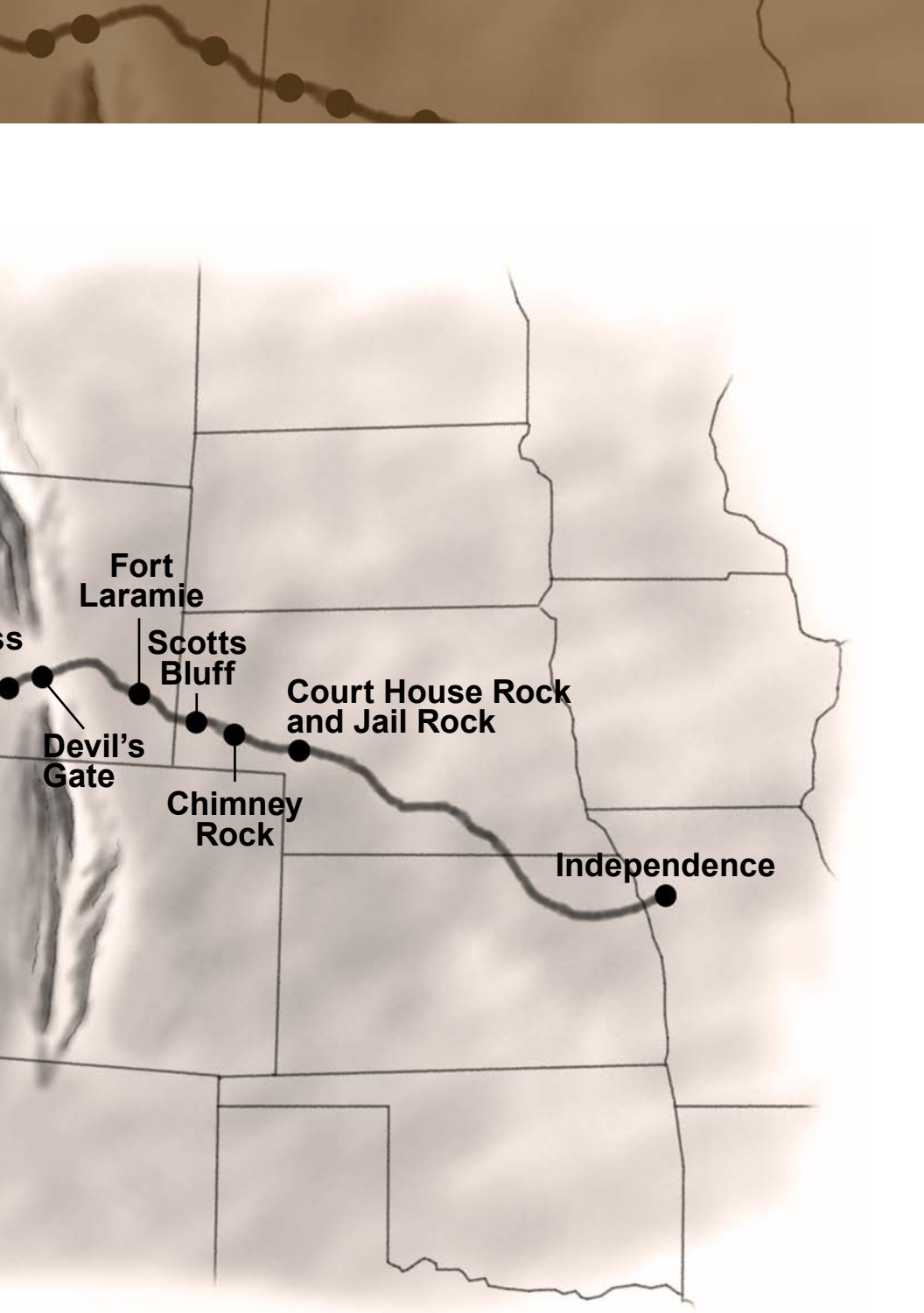
A Map of Sarah's Travels


Fort
Laramie
ss
Scotts
Bluff
Court House Rock
and Jail Rock
Devil's
Gate
Chimney
Rock
Independence

Word Watch!

Boulder: A large rock.

Gold: A soft, yellow metal found in rocks.

Iron: A strong, hard, and gray metal.

Mineral: A solid material found naturally on Earth, such as quartz.

Pebble: A small stone made smooth by weathering.

Rock: A solid, hard material from Earth's crust that is made up of minerals.

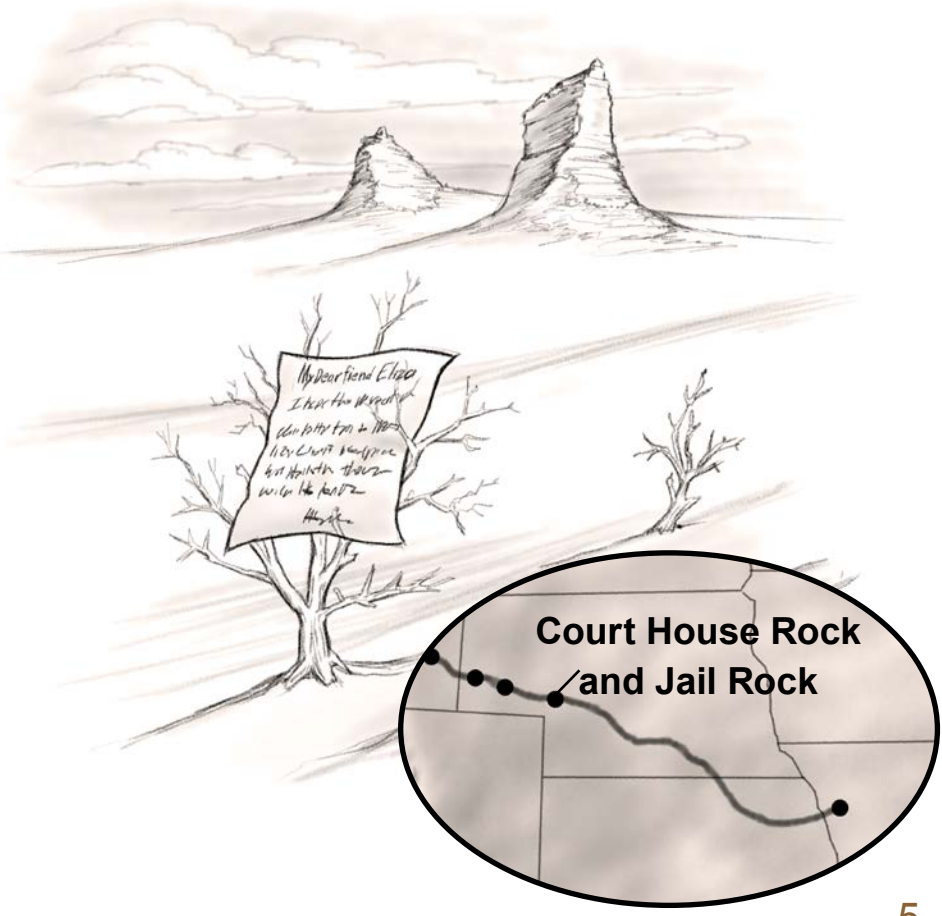
Sand: Loose, tiny pieces of rock.

Spring: A place where water comes from the ground; or, the season that follows winter.

Chapter 1

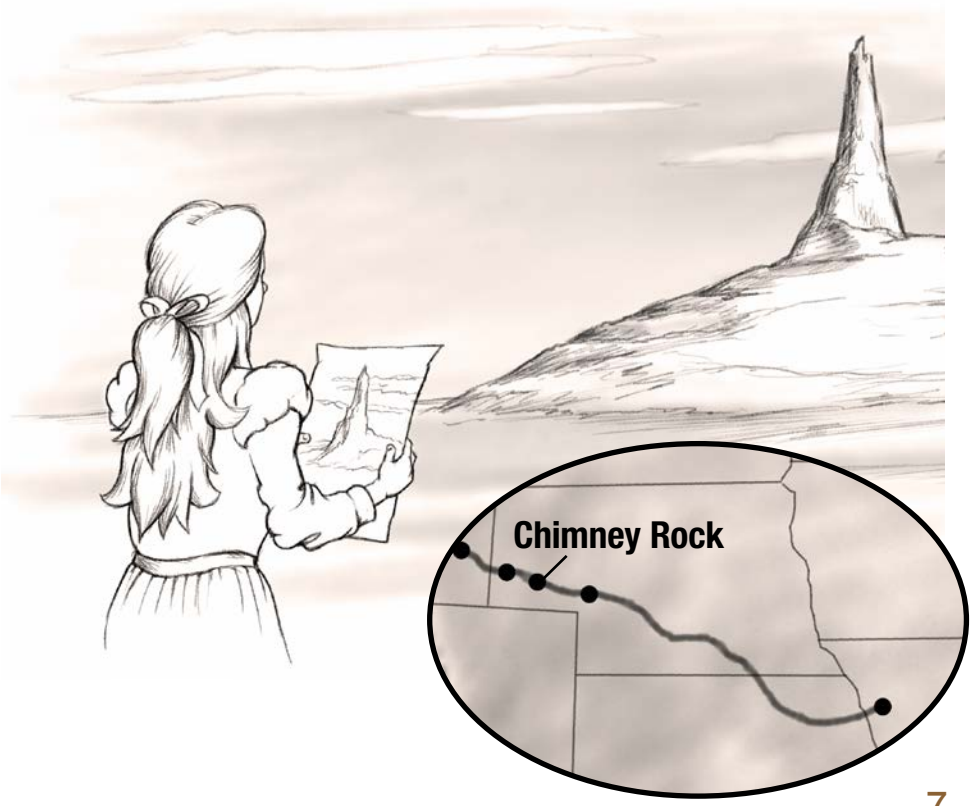
My Dear Friend Eliza,

I hope my letter finds you well. A while back, we passed by the Court House Rock and Jail Rock. Crossing the flat land, we could see the rocks from miles away. Mary and I think the Court House Rock looks more like a castle.

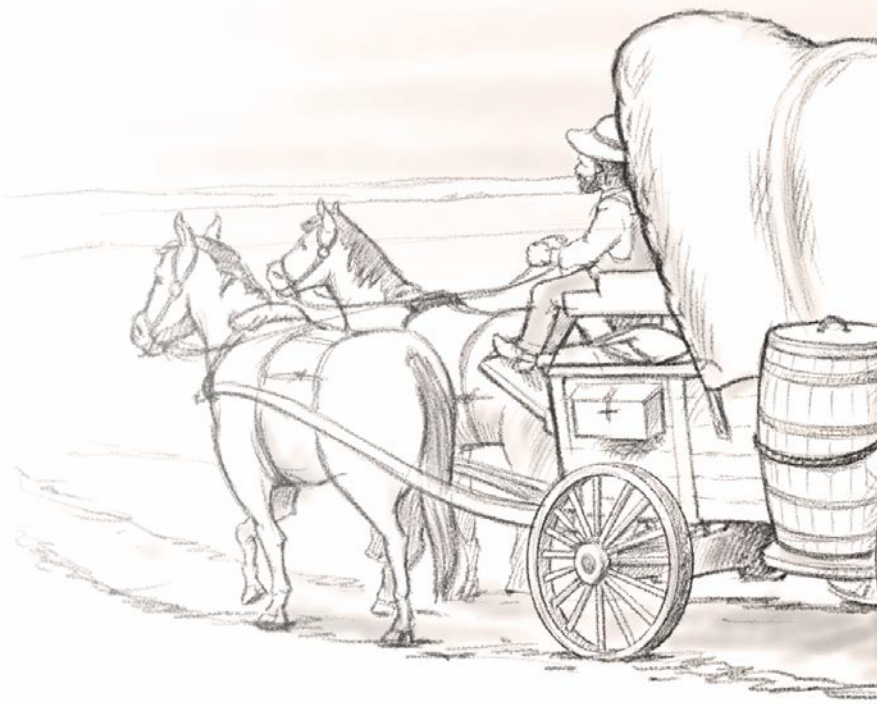


Mary is my new friend. She is ten years old, just like us. Pa is driving the lead wagon. Mary and her family are ten wagons behind ours. We spend lots of time together. Mary and I walk alongside the wagons together. We share a flat boulder to rest our feet. We talk and play after supper.

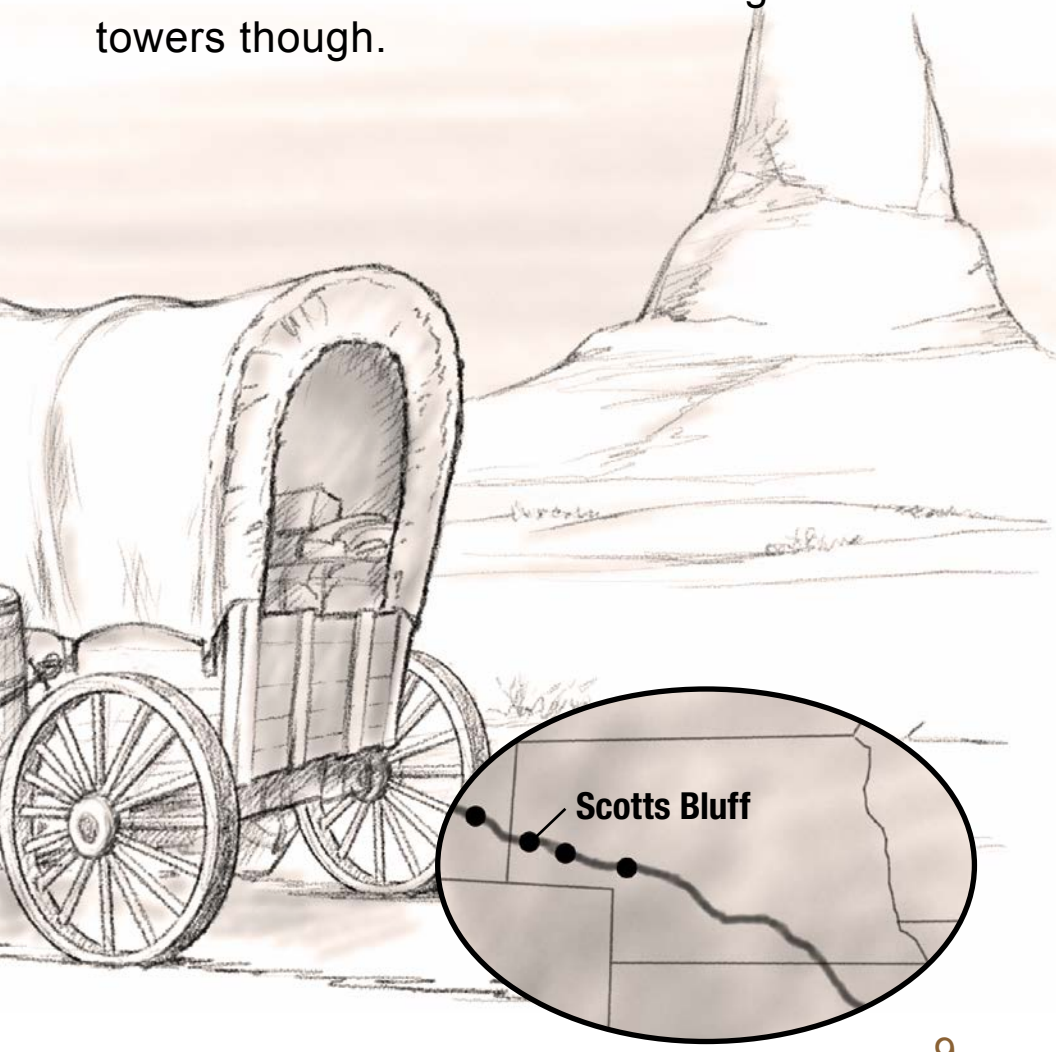
One day our wagon train camped near Chimney Rock. You would love this place. I felt as small as a bug standing next to this rock. The top part looks like a pencil pointing to the sky. The white clouds in the sky look like puffs of smoke coming from the chimney.



Some of the men in our group tried to climb the chimney. They did not get far. It was good to see them act silly. I am tired of hearing them talk about a mineral called “gold” that they will find in California.

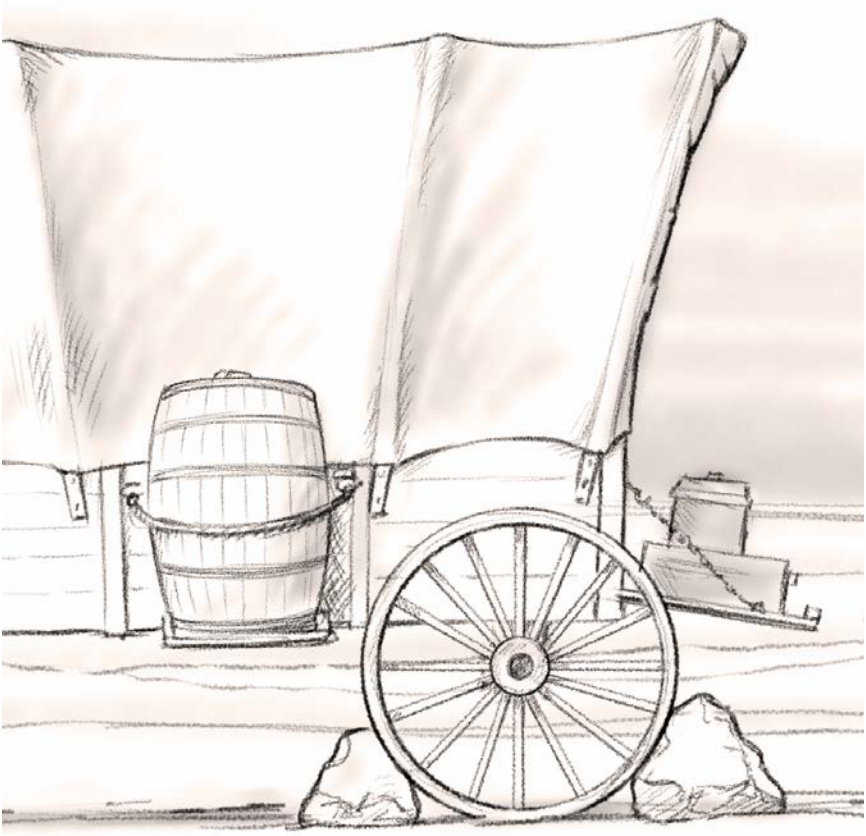


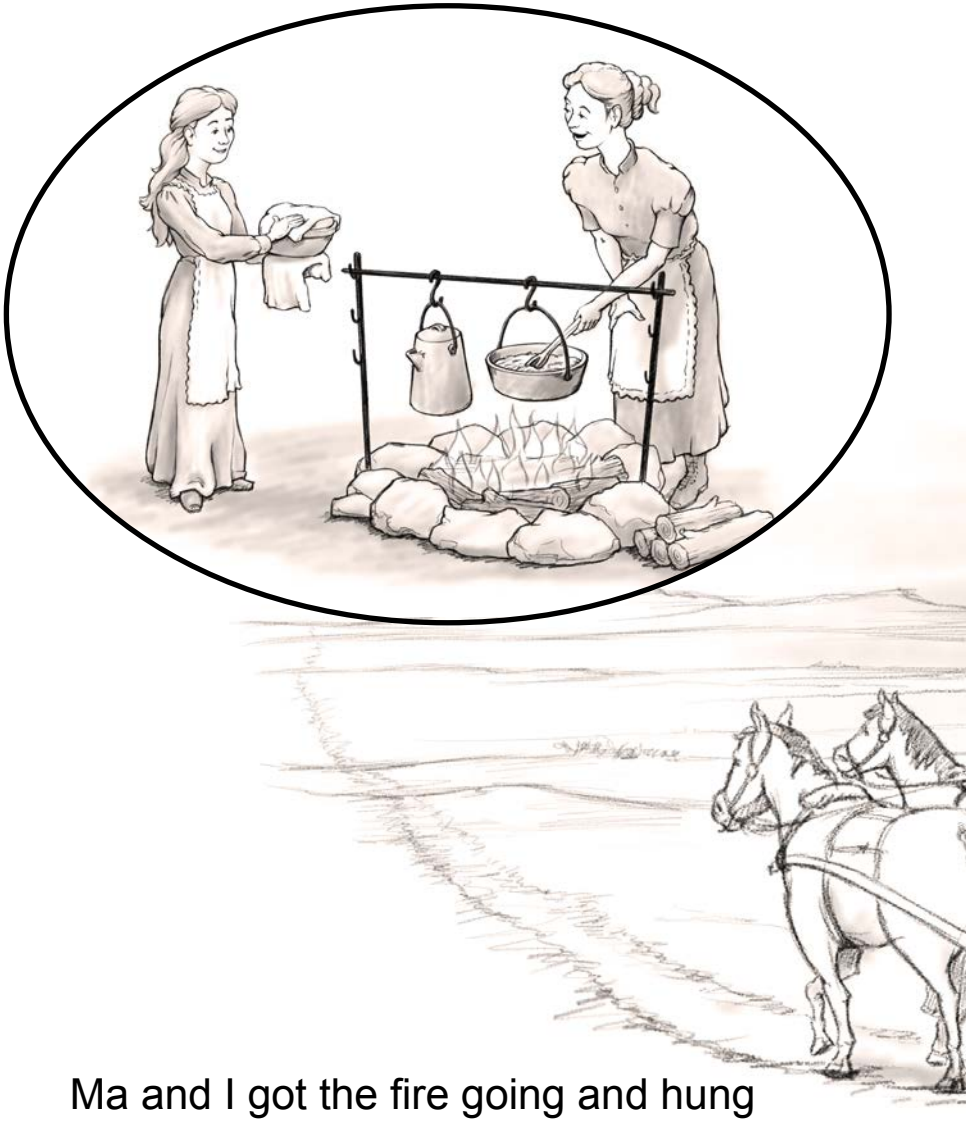
Today we reached Scotts Bluff. I do not know if I can find the words to describe it. The land here is so different from Missouri. Pa says Scotts Bluff looks like a big fort. I have never seen a fort with a round roof. I can see the rocks that look like guard towers though.



I have chores on the trip just like I had chores at home. The chores are different here. One of my jobs is to watch for boulders in the water. I sit up front when Pa drives the wagon through a creek. I look in the water for the big rocks. It is a special job. A broken wheel could hold us up for days.

We set up camp for the night. It is windy here. Ma and I dug a hole for a fire. Pa, Jesse, and Peter had already blocked the wagon wheels with big rocks. Pa is glad he hired Jesse and Peter to help.





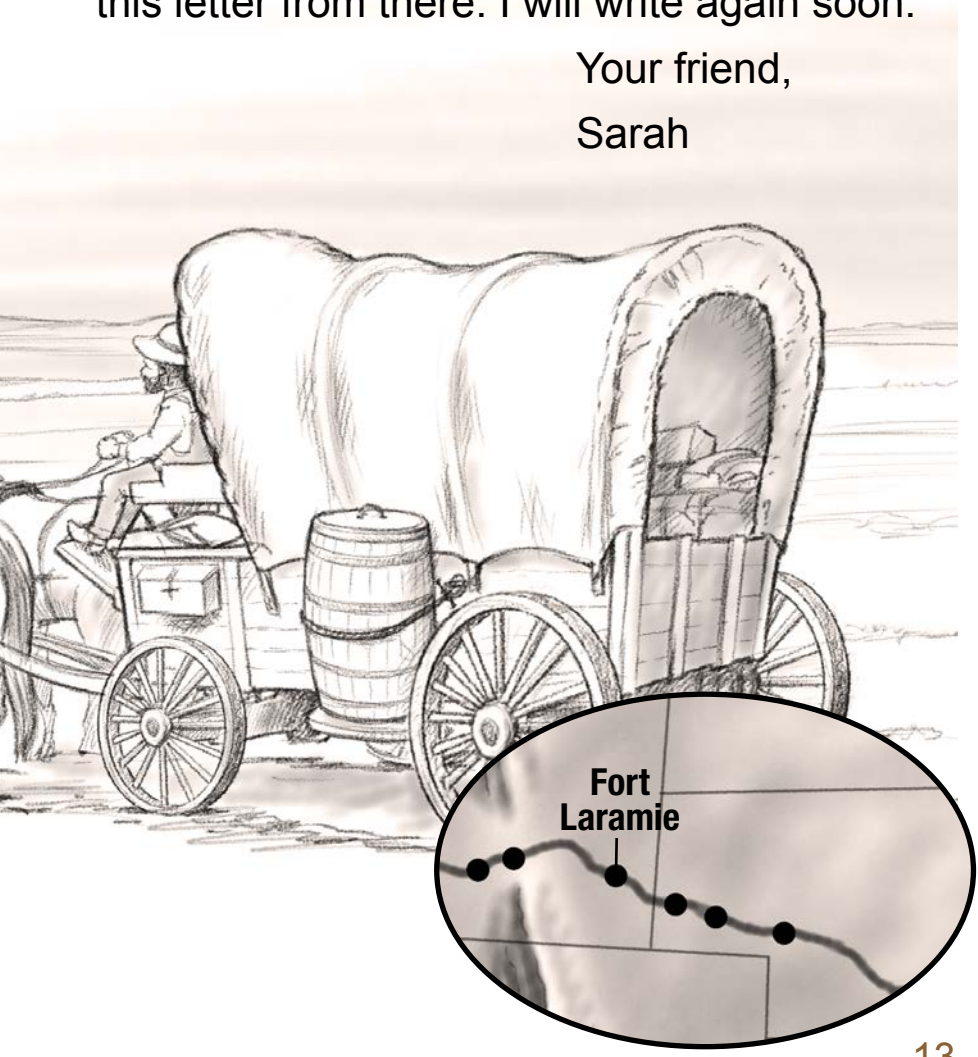
Ma and I got the fire going and hung the big iron pot over it. The hot ashes kept popping out at our skirts. Ma sent me to get some rocks to put around the fire.

She was not happy with the rocks I brought back. She sent me back for rocks so big I needed two hands to carry each one. She was right. The rocks did keep our skirts safe.

We will be at Fort Laramie soon. I will mail this letter from there. I will write again soon.

Your friend,

Sarah

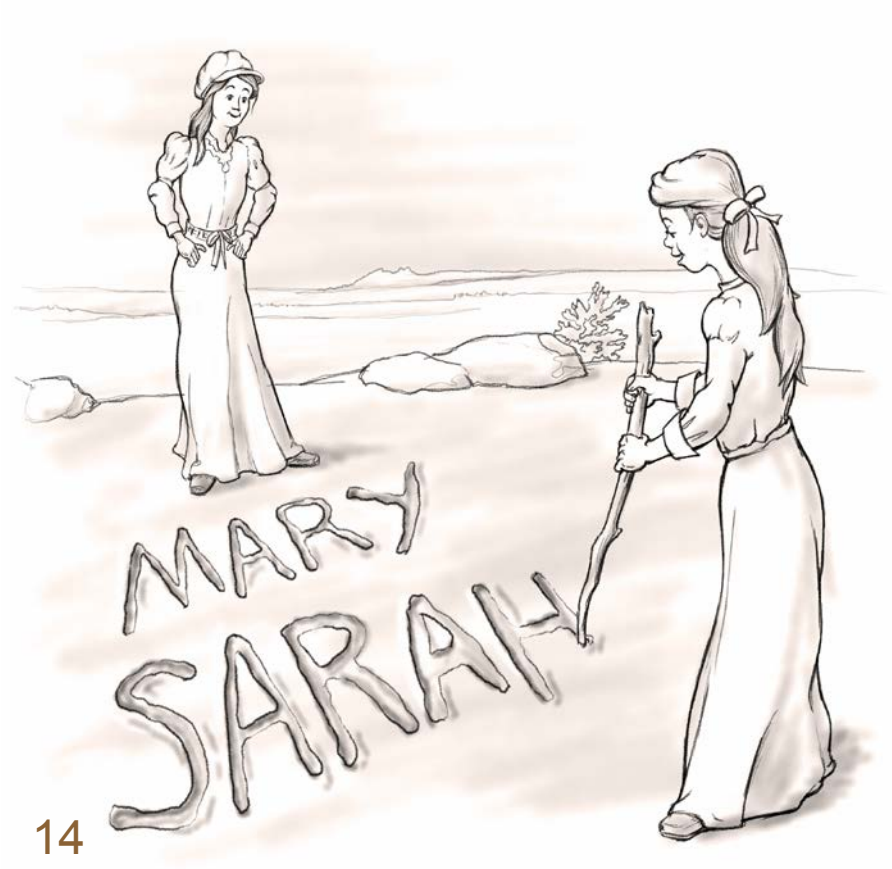


Chapter 2

My Dear Friend Eliza,

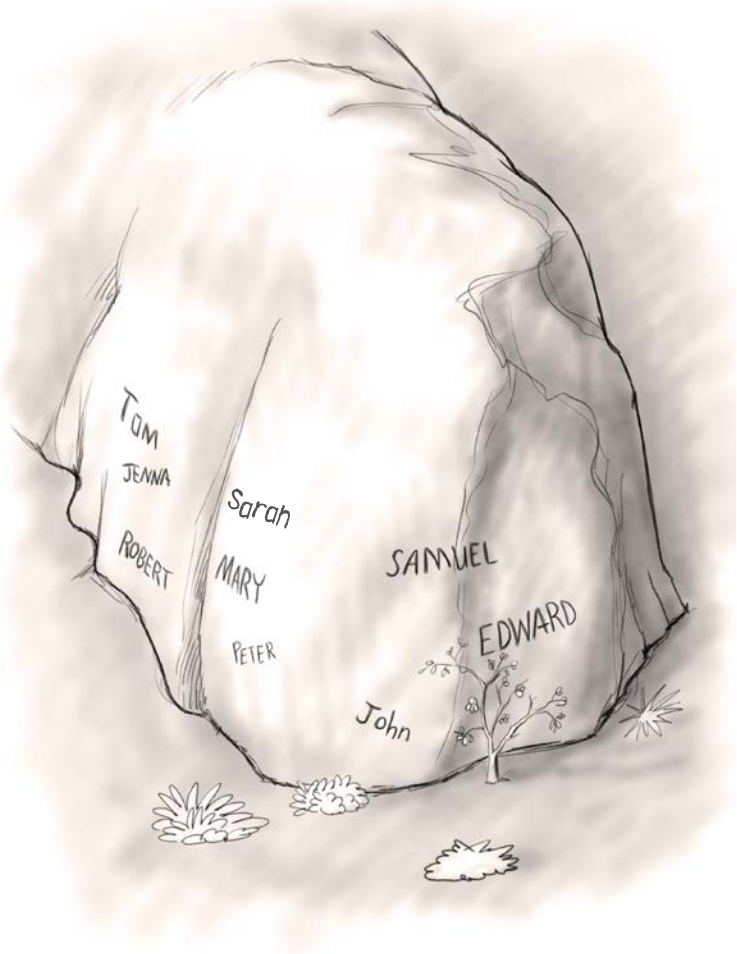
I hope my letter finds you well. Everyone talked about Independence Rock for weeks before we got there. We planned a great picnic.

Mary and I wanted to write our names on the rock. We practiced a lot. We wrote our names on our slates. We even wrote them in the dirt. We counted the days until we reached the rock.

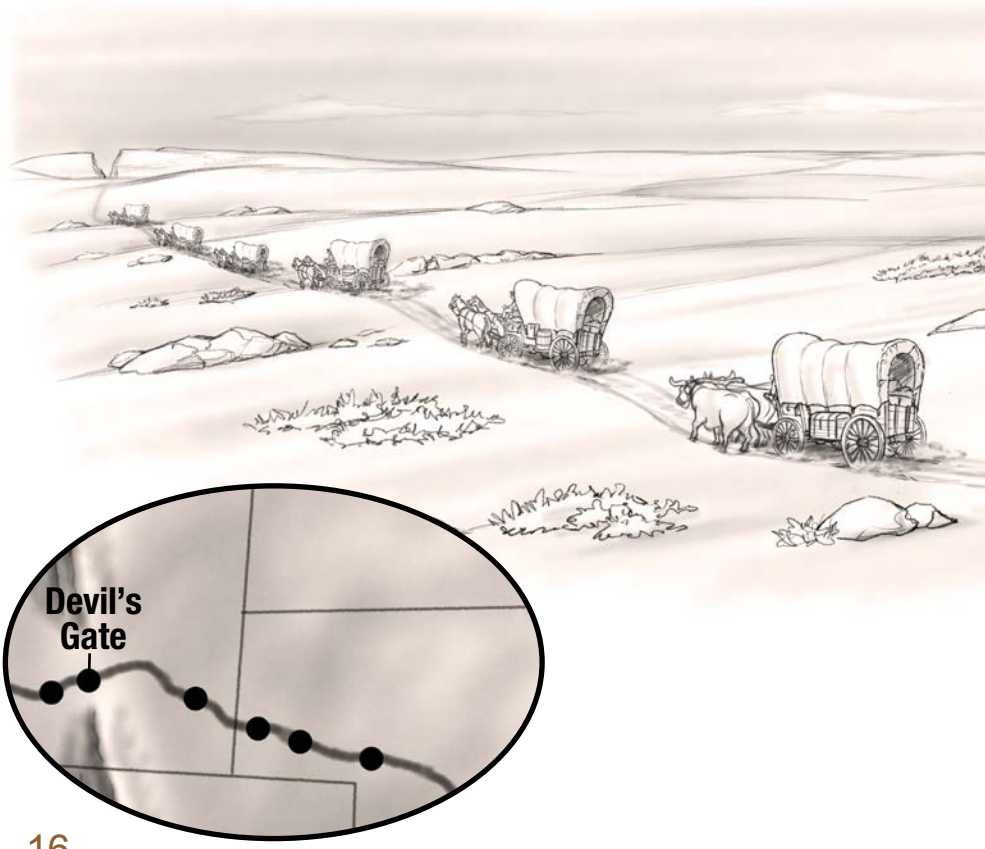


We got there at last. The women and girls baked pies. The men played their fiddles. Everyone sang songs. I was so happy.

The Sun was shining. Some people signed their names with tar. Others scratched their names into the rock.

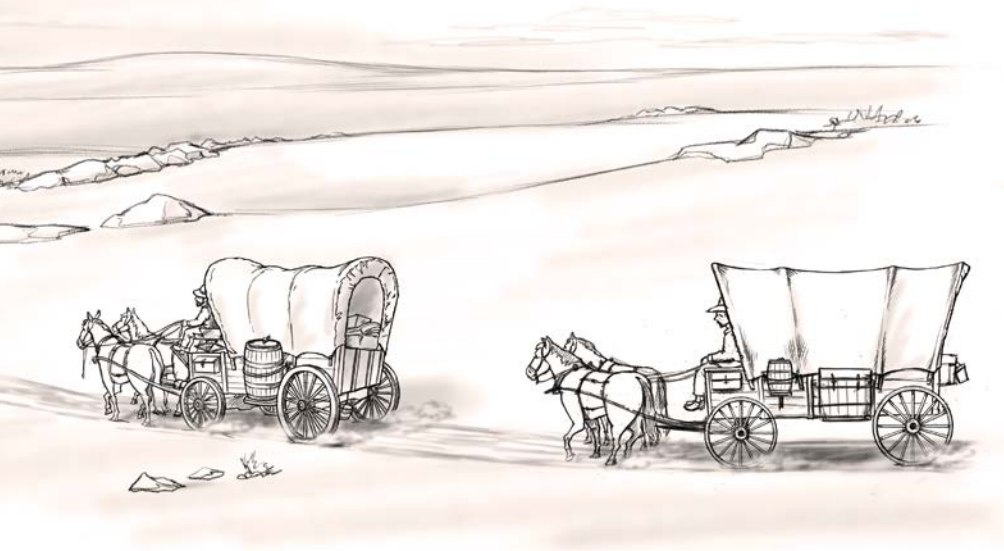


Independence Rock looks like a loaf of bread or an upside-down bowl. Names are written all over it.



The next day we camped near Devil's Gate. The Gate is a path through the mountain. It was cut by the Sweetwater River. Pa said it was too rocky. The wagons could not go that way. He said we would go around Devil's Gate in the morning.

Some of the men went to see the path on foot. Jesse went with them. He said the walls were made of piles of big rocks. The men tried to climb the rocks to the top.



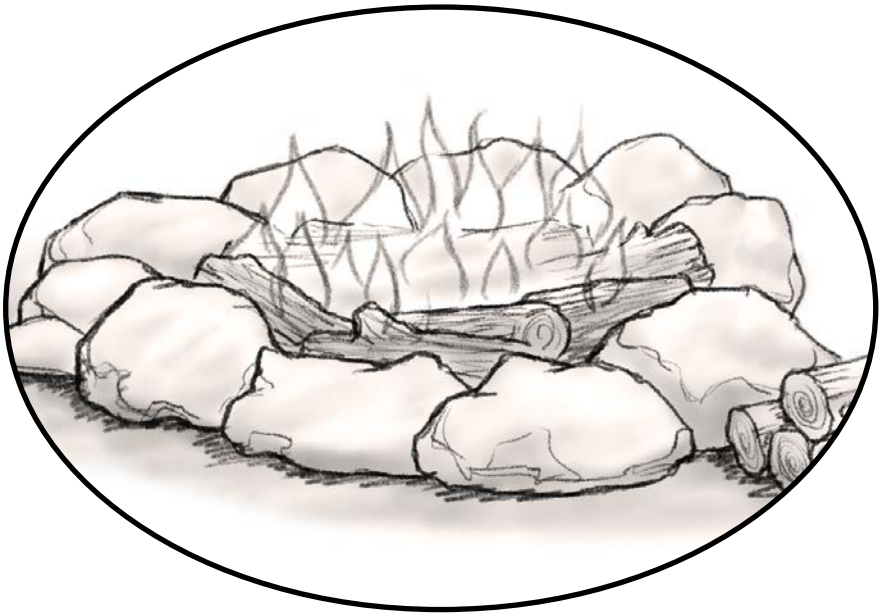
The weather in the Gate changed fast. Jesse said that hail the size of his fist came down on them. He held on to a rock for safety.

Jesse pressed himself as flat as he could against the rock. When the storm ended, the men gave up their climb. They came back to camp happy to be alive.

Even the way around the Gate was hard. The wagon train had to move more slowly.

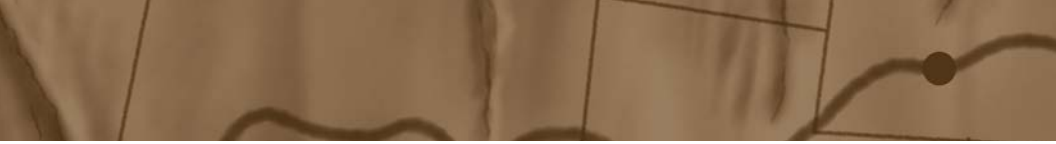
The trip up the mountains was not like I thought it would be. The biggest change was the weather. The days were warm or hot. The nights were cold.

Some days it rained. Some days it snowed. The higher we got, the more it snowed.



One night Pa told me to go get rocks no bigger than my hand. He told me to bring back as many as I could carry in my apron pockets. I did as he said. Pa put the rocks in the fire. Next he put the hot rocks in some pans. He put the pans between our blankets in the wagon. They warmed our bedding. We slept well. We have done that every night since then. I have decided Pa is very clever.

Mary brought a game with her on the trip. One night when we were playing, it started to rain. We picked up the game as fast we could. The next morning Mary said the markers were missing from the game. She cried when she told me. The game was the only plaything she brought on the trip.



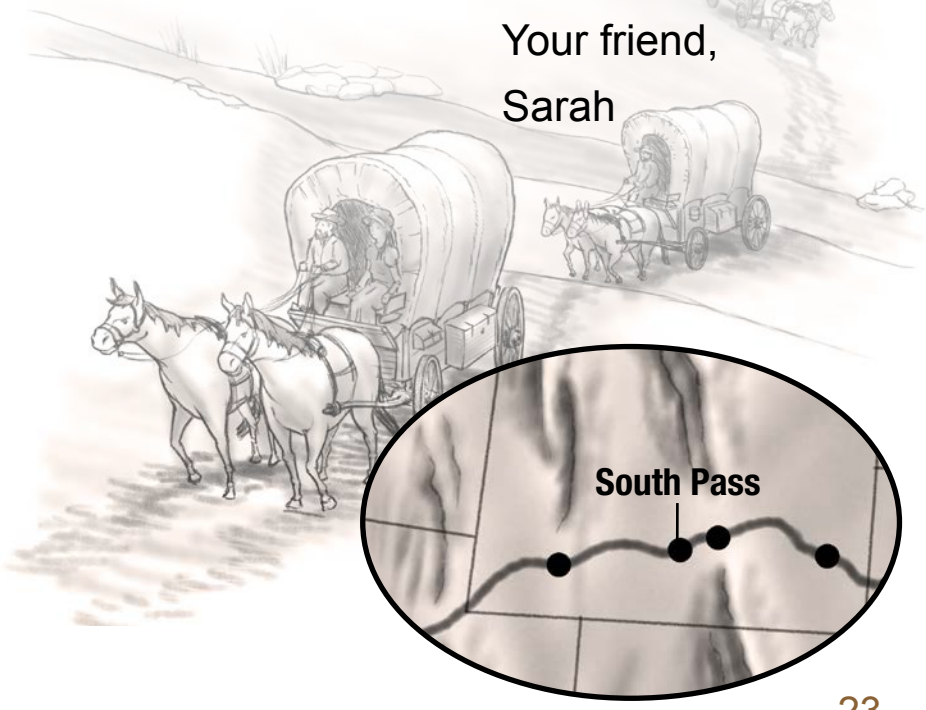
Later that day we passed a small creek. I stopped and looked. I found just what I needed. I ran back to Mary. I opened my hand to show her what I found. Six pebbles of different colors lay on my palm. They were all smooth. They made great markers for Mary's game. We have used the small rocks to play the game since then.

Today we reached South Pass. We are half way to our new home. Some of the men have decided to go on ahead of us. Peter went with them. Jesse stayed with us. He said that a deal is a deal. He and Pa had shaken hands on it. Jesse said he would keep his word. He would stay and help us reach our new home.

Another wagon train is here. They are going to Oregon. One woman said she would take our letters. She will mail them at the next fort. It has taken us many months to get this far. I will write again.

Your friend,

Sarah



Chapter 3

My Dear Friend Eliza,

I hope this letter finds you well. Too much time has passed since my last letter. I will do better. Everyone is tired. We have lost many of our animals.

The men want to move faster. They want to get to the gold. We followed the river into the desert. The river ended, and we had a long way to go. The animals had to work hard to walk in the sand. Many wagons got stuck when the wheels sunk in the dry sand.

The worst part was not finding clean water. The water we brought with us ran out. We were days from reaching the mountains. There were times I did not think we would make it out of the sand. The wind blew hard. The sand blew right through the cloth on our wagons. The men could not see where they were going. The animals were too tired to fight the wind.

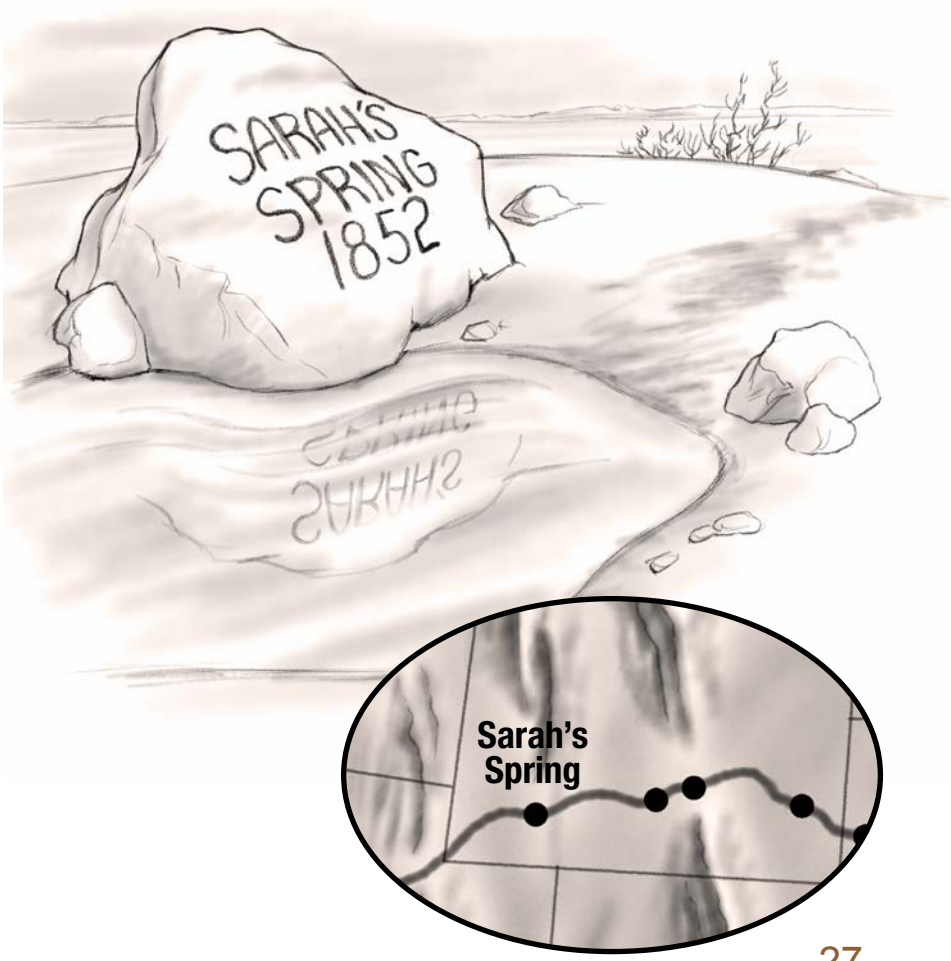
Pa found a small salt lake on the map. He said we could not drink from a salt lake. I wanted to go anyway. At last Pa agreed.

A group of us walked up a hill and saw the lake. As we walked down the other side of the hill, I saw it. There was a spring coming out of the rocks on the side of the hill. I ran over to the spring. When I reached it, I put my hands under the water pouring out of the ground.

The water was cool and clean. I brought some to my lips. No better water had I ever tasted! We all drank from the spring. We let our horses drink from the stream that ran from the spring to the salt lake.

We filled everything we had with water. We wanted to take the clean water back to our group.

Pa said we should name the spring before we left. Everyone had an idea. Mine was to name it Desert Spring. Jesse and Mary said they had a better idea. Jesse said it in Pa's ear. Pa nodded his head. Jesse picked up a rock. He used it to write on the boulder above the spring.

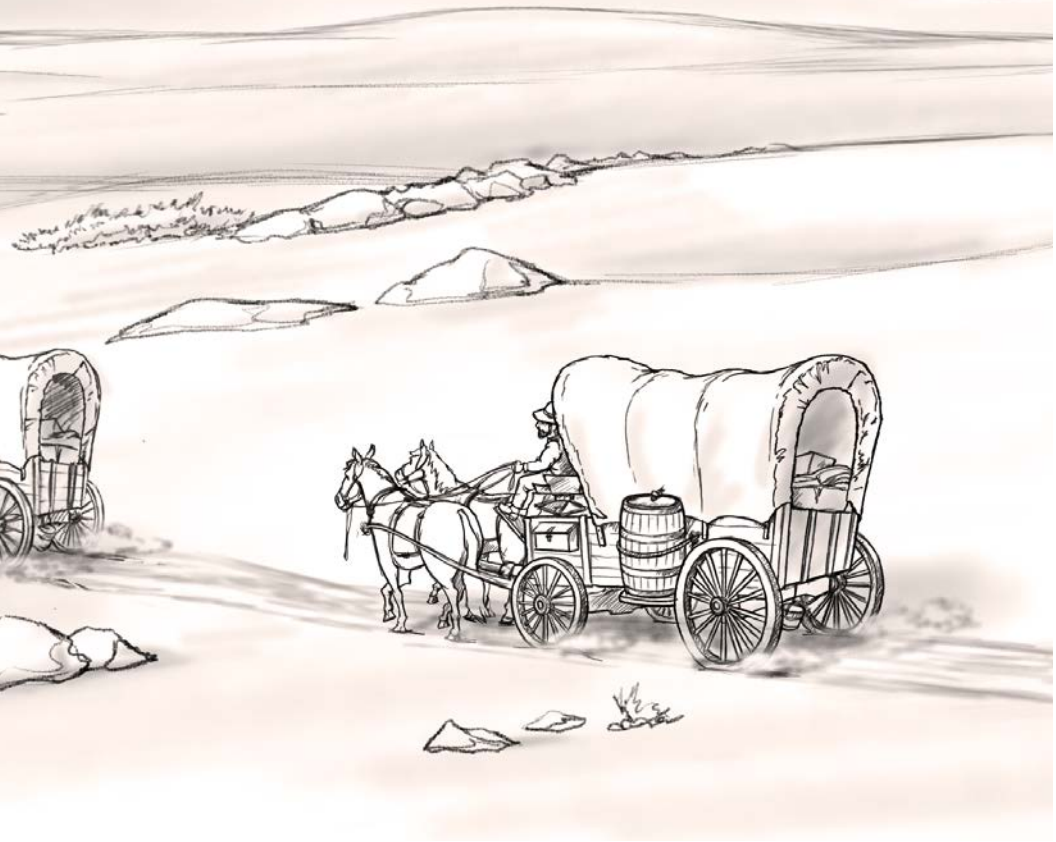


The Sacramento Valley sits on the other side of the mountains. Pa says it will be a hard trip. Ma says the spring gave us more than water. It gave us hope. We will make it to our new home.

I will write when we get there.

Your friend,

Sarah



Unit Title: **The Earth Rocks**
Grade: **2**

Science Standards 2.3.a. and 2.3.b.
Supports ELA Standard: Reading 2.2.7.

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