

## Comprehension Workbook 7

# River Crossing

## A story of pioneers

The Platte



Wagons



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles



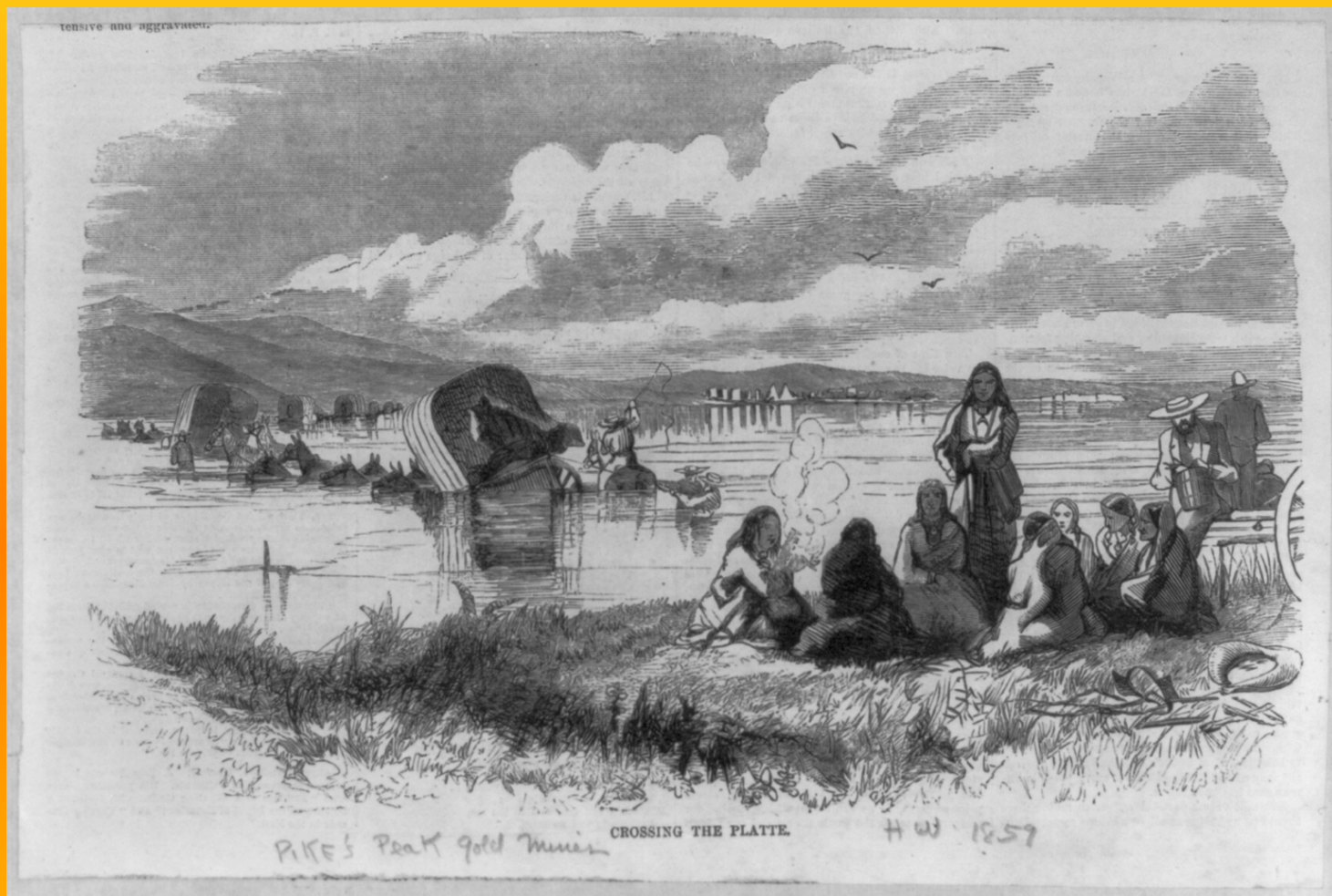
# Crossing the River Platte

The Platte is a river in North America. During the 19th century, as many pioneer farmers moved west with their wagons and oxen, they had to cross this great river. Here is some of what they wrote in 1850:



"As we neared the spot where we chose to cross, we observed at least 400 wagons on the bank and at least 3000 oxen. The shouting and hallooing, combined with the bawling of cattle made a confusion of stunning sounds."

"The Platte was so deep and broad it could not be forded. The wagons were made watertight and the cattle were swum over, men swimming alongside."



"A place was discovered where we could cross. The river is over a mile wide and its water boiling and eddying until it is completely mixed with sand. Into this flood, fearful and dangerous to look at, our wagons commenced plunging one after another. On reaching the opposite shore the drivers found the legs of their trousers literally cut to pieces by the sand and force of the water..."







# Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

**a** Write the sentence in which you found the word '**stunning**'.

**b** From that sentence, suggest what '**stunning**' means.

**c** Write a new sentence using the word '**stunning**'.

**d** Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to '**stunning**'.

**e** Draw a small picture showing what you think '**stunning**' means.



# Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: observed	saw

3

# Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

**1** Write a heading for your summary.

**2** Now write the main idea in one sentence.  
e.g. "This story tells us..."

**3** Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

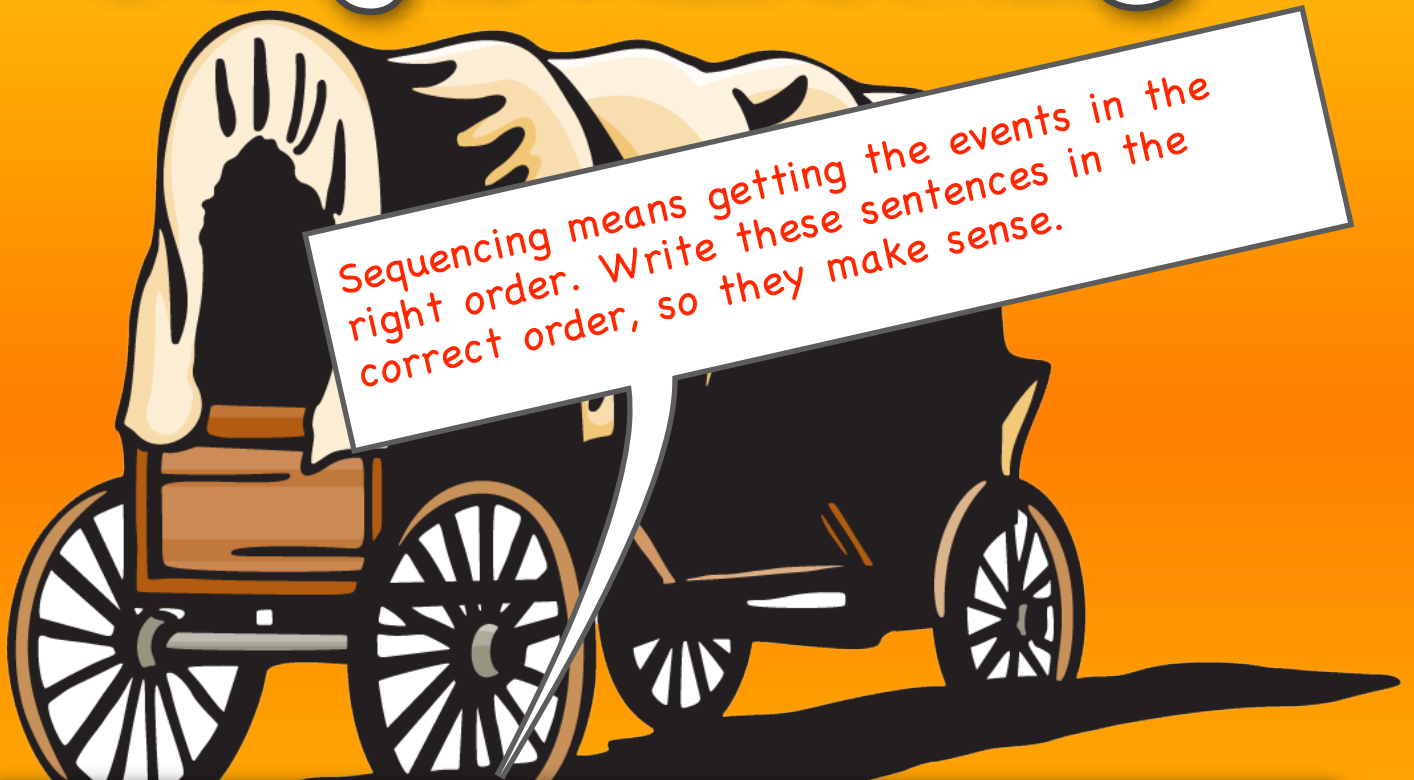
**Finally,  
can you rewrite your  
summary to make it better?**

- 1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.**
- 2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.**
- 3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.**
- 4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?**

**There is  
nothing wrong  
with rewriting; even  
the best authors  
rewrite their  
work.**

123  
4

# Sequencing



Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

On reaching the opposite shore their trousers were cut to pieces.

The wagons plunged in one after another.

As we neared the crossing point, the shouting on the bank made a confusion of sounds.

We observed 400 wagons.

The Platte was so wide and deep it could not be forded.

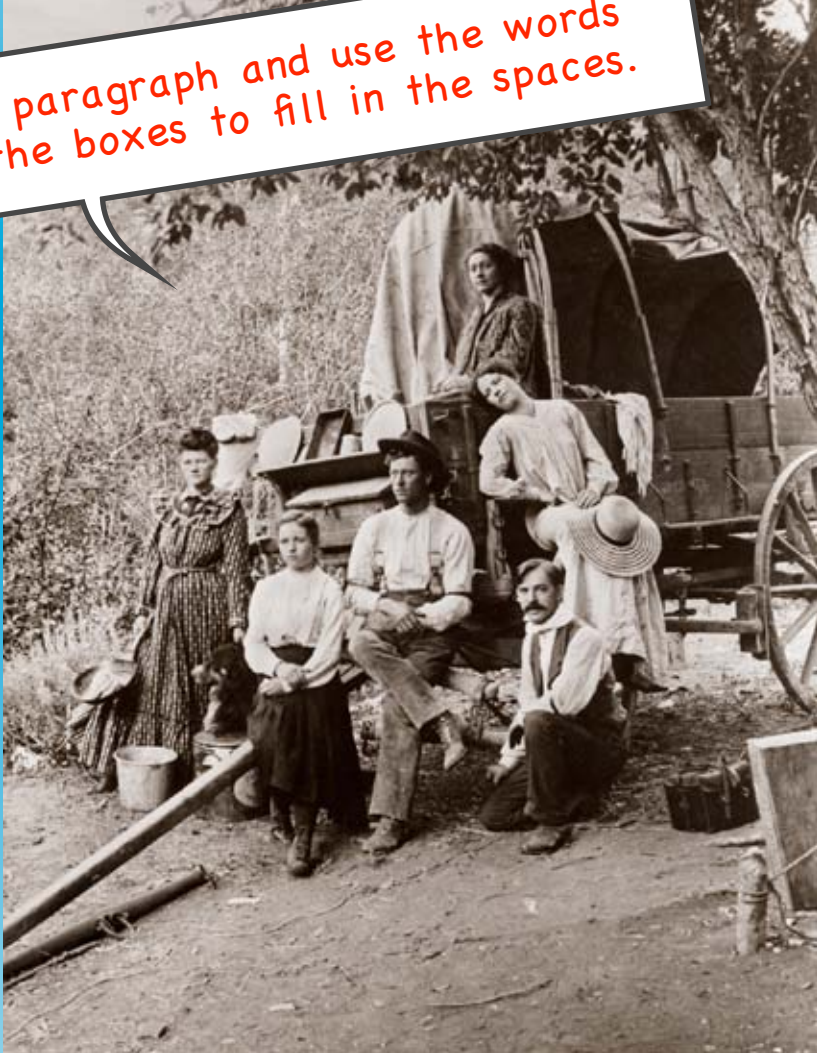
A place was discovered where we could cross.





# Get to the facts

Copy this paragraph and use the words from the boxes to fill in the spaces.



force

forded

river

wagons

With only simple \_\_\_\_\_ and oxen, it was hard to cross the \_\_\_\_\_. It could not be \_\_\_\_\_, and instead, the oxen had to swim across, pulling the floating wagons. It was extremely hard to cross because of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the water.





# Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.

1 Why would the people be hallooing?

2 How do we know that the banks were steep?

3 Why do you think the men swam alongside the oxen?

4 If they could have forded how deep would the water have been?



# Opinions matter

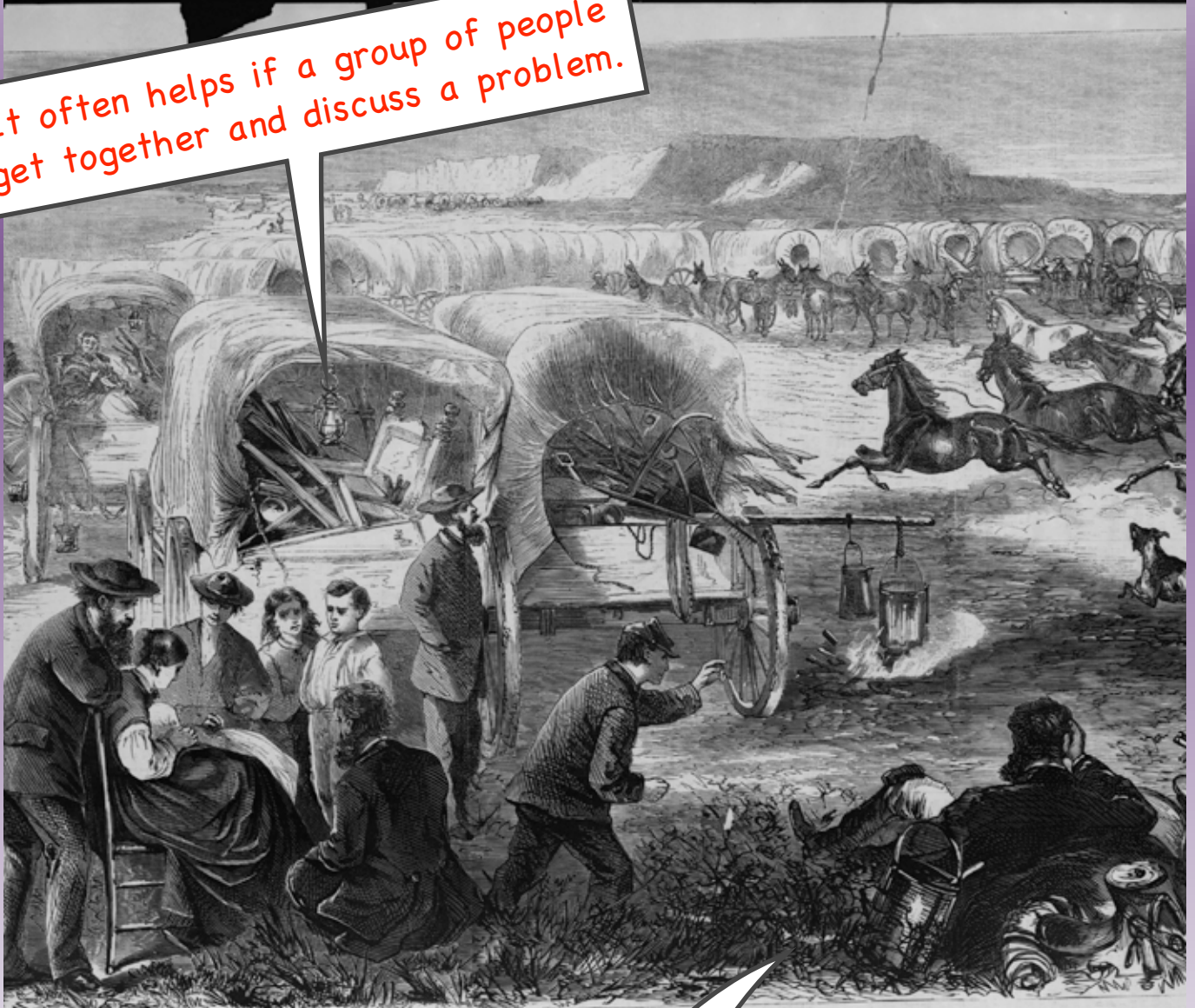
Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

- 1 Do you think you would have been afraid of this crossing? Explain why.
- 2 Using words from the story, try to write a description of the river as though you were a scientist, rather than a wagon driver.
- 3 Why do you think the trousers of the drivers were cut to pieces?  
(Hint: see The River Book, page 13)
- 4 It was not surprising to find lots of people at the crossing because most pioneers travelled in wagon trains for their own safety. Imagine some of the emergencies when it might be good to have lots of company.
- 5 Why do you think they put up with this hardship instead of just turning round and going home?



# Talking it through

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



## Discussion topic: Living in a wagon train

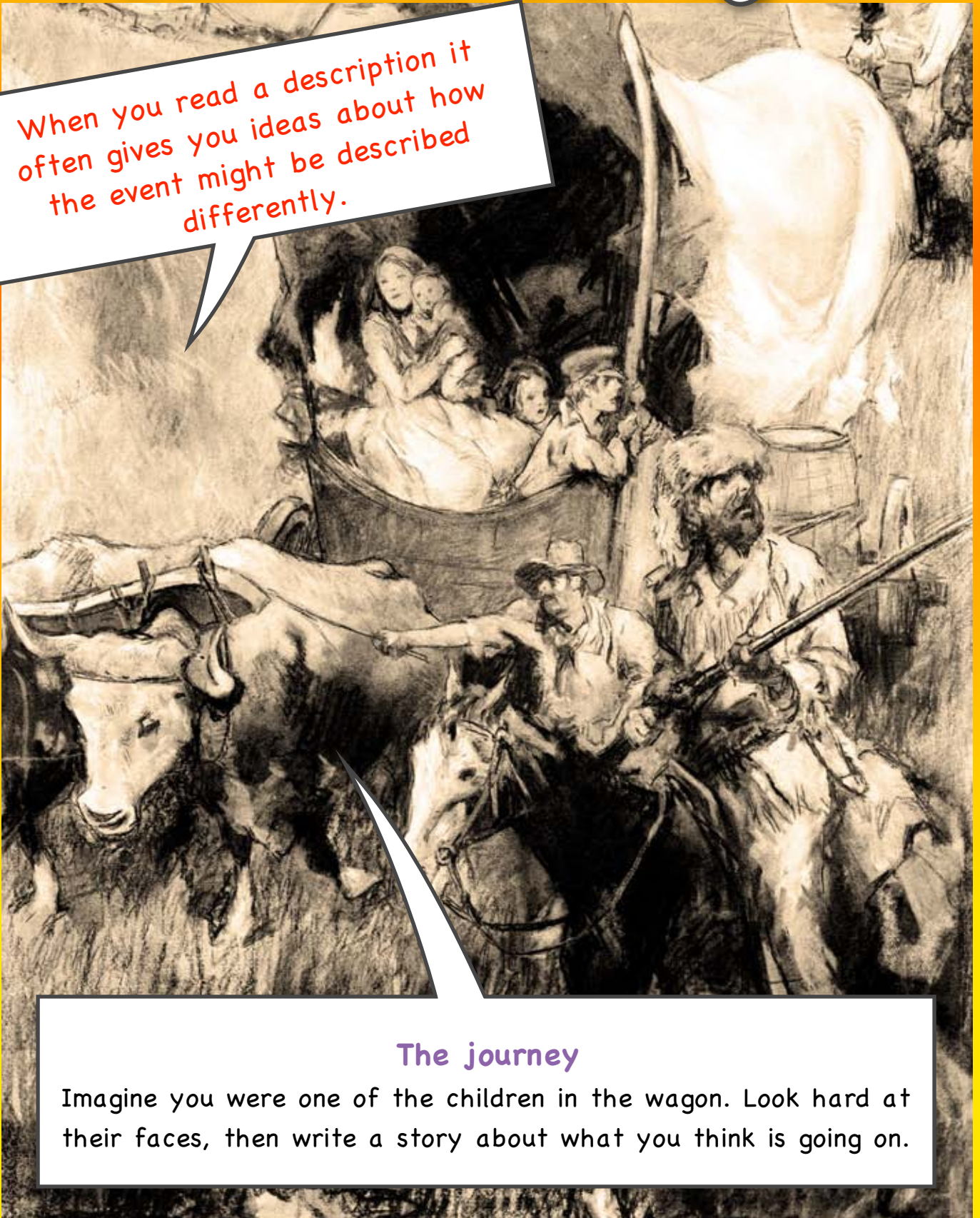
If you were a pioneer, you were going into unknown territory and also into a land that was lived in by Native Americans who thought it was their rightful home. Discuss why the pioneers still pressed on and why the Native Americans tried to stop them.





# Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.



## The journey

Imagine you were one of the children in the wagon. Look hard at their faces, then write a story about what you think is going on.

# Crossing the River Platte in the 1850s

The Platte is a river in North America. During the 19th century, as many pioneer farmers moved west with their wagons and oxen, they had to cross this great river. Here is some of what they wrote:

“As we neared the spot where we chose to cross, we observed at least 400 wagons on the bank and at least 3000 oxen. The shouting and hallooing, combined with the bawling of cattle made a confusion of stunning sounds.”

“The Platte was so deep and broad it could not be forded. The wagons were made watertight and the cattle were swum over, men swimming alongside.”

“A place was discovered where we could cross. The river is over a mile wide and its water boiling and eddying until it is completely mixed with sand. Into this flood, fearful and dangerous to look at, our wagons commenced plunging one after another. On reaching the opposite shore the drivers found the legs of their trousers literally cut to pieces by the sand and force of the water...”