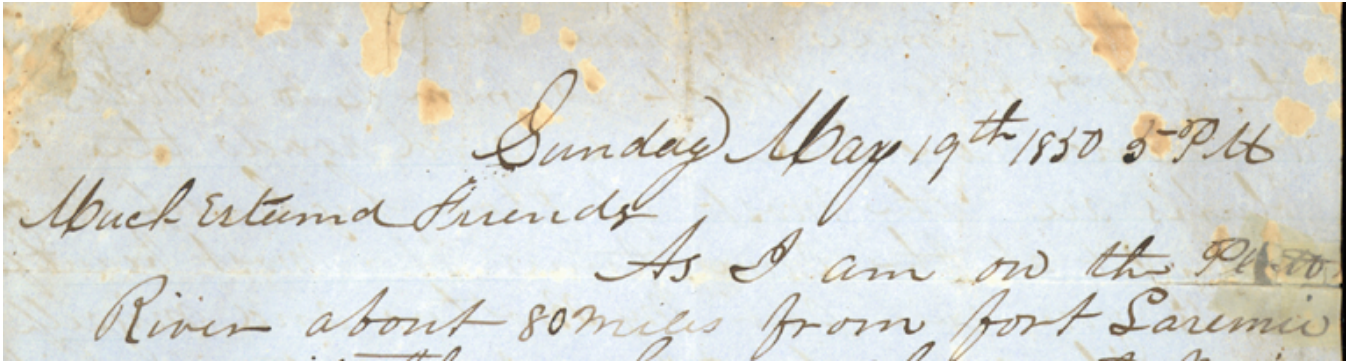


# Making Sense of Letters

## Explore how letters work as historical evidence

### SOL Connection:

**USI.8b** The student will demonstrate knowledge of westward expansion and reform in America from 1801 to 1861 by identifying the geographic and economic factors that influenced the westward movement of settlers.



Example: Much esteemed friends, 1850

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/upboverbib:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(dia5578\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/upboverbib:@field(DOCID+@lit(dia5578)))

### ACTIVITY (complete this activity)

1. This letter is about a young man traveling West in 1850. What do you think he might write about?
2. Read the original letter to “Much Esteemed Friends.” What can you learn from your first reading? What questions do you have? (Choose a hand-out from your folder to use as a guide.)
3. Now read the bibliographic record from the Library of Congress and the transcription of the letter. Complete the hand-out you chose. What questions do you still have?

### REFLECTION (consider these questions)

4. How would you introduce the above activity to your students? What would you have them do after completing the activity?
5. What do you think makes this lesson engaging for students? What drawbacks do you see to this lesson?
6. What would be an appropriate “learning goal” for this activity?

## Where can I find more items like this one?

From [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov), click on **American Memory**

Choose **Immigration, Westward Expansion** under “Browse by Collection Topic”

Choose **Utah and Western Migration ~ Multiformat ~ 1846-1869** Trails to Utah and the Pacific: Diaries and Letters, 1846-1869

Choose **Categories of Materials**. Choose **diaries**.

Click on any title that interests you. Click on the thumbnail of the item.

**HINT:** if an image does not appear on the bibliographic information page, click on “View this item.” If the letter is more than one page, click on NEXT IMAGE to scroll through the letter.

**OR**

From [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov), click on **American Memory**

Click on the **BROWSE** button in the top, center of the screen.

Click **List all Collections**.

Choose a collection that seems to apply to your topic.

Click on **Search by Keyword**.

Type “letter” in the search box.

Click **Search**.

Click on any title that interests you.

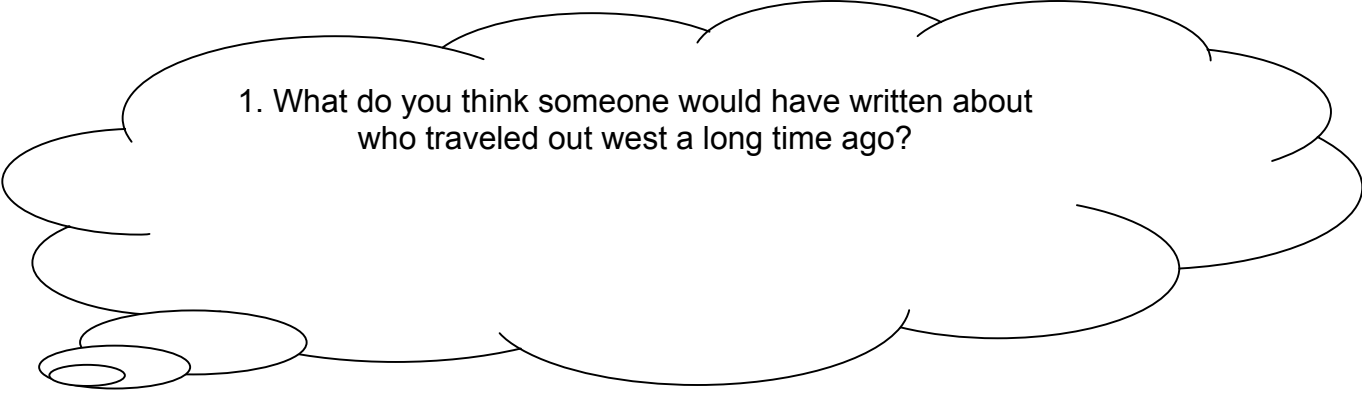
**HINT:** If the letter is handwritten look for a link that says “Transcription” or “View text.” To see if the Library has a transcription.

**For some interesting results, try these search terms in the Search box in the upper right-hand corner of American Memory:**

“love letter”

“president children letter”

## Making Sense of Letters



1. What do you think someone would have written about who traveled out west a long time ago?

2. Circle the date the letter was written.

3. Underline any words you don't recognize or can't read.

4. Reading what you can in the letter, go back and write in words that you think make sense for some of the words that you underlined.

5. Choose one sentence from the letter and rewrite it here:

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
-------------------------

6. What do you think this letter is about?

7. After reading the printed version of this letter or listening to a reading of this letter, what new information do you have about the letter?

8. How accurate was the sentence you wrote out?

9. What questions do you have about this letter?

10. How could you go about getting answers to the questions you wrote above?

## *Making Sense of Letters*

What do you think a young man traveling west in 1850 might write about?

**First Reading**

**Second reading (with transcription)**

Identify factual information (who is writing, about what, when, and where)

Who are the main characters described in the letter?

What is the plot of the letter?

What questions do you have about the letter? Include words you can't decode or understand.

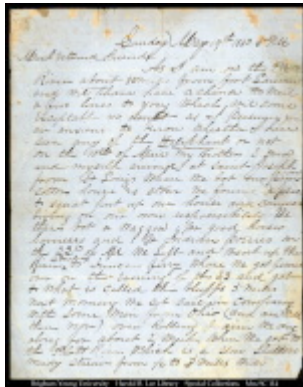
What research would you need to do to widen your understanding of this letter?

## Trails to Utah and the Pacific: Diaries and Letters, 1846-1869

### Item 1 of 1413

*Click on picture for larger image, full item, or more versions*

[\[Rights and Reproductions\]](#)



[View text](#)

### Much esteemed friends, 1850

#### SUMMARY

Handwritten and unsigned letter dated 19 May 1850. Item was written by an unidentified member of a wagon train and includes some detail about the author's preparation for the trip to California. The letter describes the overland journey from Saint Joseph, Missouri, to the Platte River and ends 80 miles from Fort Laramie, Wyoming. Author mentions dining on buffalo, weather conditions, and cooking on the plains.

#### NOTES

Diarist: Unknown

Years of travel: 1850

Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, MSS SC 114. 1 item (4 p.)

#### SUBJECTS

[Pioneers--West \(U.S.\)--Correspondence](#)

[Overland journeys to the Pacific](#)

[Text](#)

[Electronic diary](#)

[Diaries](#)

[Electronic books](#)

[Letters](#)

#### MEDIUM

1 item (4 p.)

**REPOSITORY**

Original manuscript available at Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

**RELATED ITEM**

[Transcription as PDF file from Brigham Young University](#)

[Page view from Brigham Young University](#)

**DIGITAL ID**

upbover dia5578



AMERICAN  
MEMORY

[PREVIOUS](#)

[NEXT](#)

[ITEM LIST](#)

[NEW SEARCH](#)

**Trails to Utah and the Pacific: Diaries and Letters, 1846-1869**

**Much esteemed friends, 1850**

**May 1850**

---

Page 1

{ [page image](#) }

Letter-May 19, 1850

Sunday May 19th 1850 5 PM

Much Esteemed Friends

As I am on this Pl~~l~~tt

River about 80 miles from fort Larimie

and Wil tha~~l~~e have a chance to mail

a few lines to you Which wil come

Exceptabl~~l~~ no dou~~l~~ t as I presume you

are anxious to know Wheather I have

seen any of the Helephant or not

on the 10th of April my Brother E Drew

and myself arrived at Saint Joseph

from St Louis Whare we bot our provis~~l~~ions~~l~~

cotton house and stove We found a plac~~l~~

to squat put up our house and comene~~l~~

Living on our own responsibility We

than bot a Waggon 1 pr good horses

harneses and 1 pr Indian ponies on

the 22th of Apr We Left and Went up the

River ~~l~~4 miles~~l~~ to Duncan ferry Whare We got ferried

over on the Evening of the 23 and got

to What is called th~~l~~ bluffs 5 miles

next morning We set sail in company

With some Men from Ohio (and are With

them now) over Rolling Prairie We dug

along for about 2 Weeks When We got to

th Platt River Which is a slow shallow

mudy stream from 1/2 to 3 miles Wide

[Added terms: Food; Commerce; Platte River (Neb.); Fort Laramie (Wyo. : Fort); Drew, E.; Saint Joseph (Mo.); Saint Louis (Mo.); Missouri River; Duncan's Ferry (Mo. and Kan.)]

---

Page 2 { [page image](#) }

Since that time We have been travailing on the Platt bottom Which is from 1/4 to 5 miles Wide and very level and good roads the bluffs are the most of them high *{illegible->}* [-] f abrupt and yet at the same time the most beautifu*{illegible->}* [-] sights you ever saw My Brother and myself had the curiosity to go to a certain high Bluff We saw at a distance ahead as soon as We got our bite of Pilot bread and dry beef off We started We at Last got thare and got on top of it one side Was 150 feet perpendicular and back of it Was deep Ravines steep hills Wild looking places We stayed about 5 minutes and Walking very fast made the teams after 4 hours absence We Ware satisfied With our curiosity We have traaveled on this river about 2 Weeks and have about as long to travail on it yet. We started to soon for grass but Brot corn and as the corn gave out the grass grew beter it is now good feed and the teams have stood it nice and are dooing Wel the roads are the best I ever saw in any Coun*{begin inserted text}*ty*{end inserted text}* most of the roads are smoother and beter than the roads through your town We forded the south fork of the Platt River distance about one Mile and the Water in the deepest place Was not over 2 ft some Quick sand pased all Wet

[Added terms: Platte River (Neb.); South Platte River (Colo. and Neb.)]

---

Page 3 { [page image](#) }

for about 4 days after we struck the Platt rivr We saw some timber principlaly cotton Wood

and Elm since that We have seen but litte  
We have to burn Buffalo Chips wh{illegible->} [-] ch when  
dry burn first {illegible->} [----] We have had but litte  
rain and I have had no chance to try  
dry {begin inserted text}wet{end inserted text}ones but should think they would  
not burn so wel When we crossed the  
platt Rivr thare was a company Which  
had Killed a Buffalo I went to buy a  
piece and one man gave me about 10{illegible->} [-]  
Which I could not persuade him take  
the first farthing for I divided it among  
the company and we had about 2 messes  
one of our company helped Kil an Antelope  
which we had the privelage of trying and  
they ware both as good meat as ever I  
eat I have seen lots of Buffalo in large  
droves at a distance but not seen any  
neer by except one that some of our Comp{illegible->} [--]  
Killed yesturday Which was a nice fat  
3 yr old (Bull) they packed in about 150 LBs  
on a horse which they got into Camp they  
sung out hurrah Budys here it is Wolk  
up and help yourselves our company numbers  
24 men and 30horses We are Living high  
to day on BuffaloBull beef cooked ovr  
Buffalo chips you need not envy us our  
situation but the Beef Was tender and {begin inserted text}good {end inserted text}

[Added terms: North Platte River]

---

Page 4 { [page image](#) }

I have to do the cooking and my Brother and  
{illegible->} [-] ren (which makes our mess) does the other Work  
You would Laughed to see the first short cake  
I made an effort at I missed th distance  
and got it Long Cake but since that I hav  
had good luck the most I have seen of the  
Hellephant I Wil tel you of the first mondy  
after we started at about 10 Am the Wind  
comenced blowing and it was Very dry  
it continued to rise and after noon we had  
a long level prairie to cros the Wind blew

a perfect gale I thought there was a chance  
for a shipwreck but we pressed forward it  
blew off wagon covers and started the loads  
and if a man's hat started it was no use  
to follow on foot or on horseback our camp *{begin inserted text} any {end inserted text}*  
lost about five *{illegible->}* [-] men lost 2 and left  
him without a hat it drove to and every  
and no camping ground showed itself  
The wind still blowing and the gravel  
flying and I am afraid I should have  
lost a *{illegible}* *{begin inserted text}* my pony *{end inserted text}* if it was not that I had him  
packed with 3 1/2 bushels of corn We drove until  
dark without any wood or water at last we  
came to a little stream and every one halted  
We got up our tent and plenty of water no  
wood except an old chunk which one of  
the cooks found I boiled tea by it and