

# ALKALI STATION

## Trail Talk

Alkali Station, located about 10 miles east of Ogallala, NE, served as a rest stop for migrants and transporters during the western migration in the 1850's and 1860's. It has also been home to a Pony Express station, a telegraph station, and an army base during the Civil War and Indian War. Alkali Station survives today because it has never been plowed. Remains of sod buildings, walls, and corrals that were built are all visible and historic trail wagon ruts can be seen leading to and past the site. "Alkali" is a chemical compound that can occur naturally in water or soil. It is typically a caustic or corrosive substance,, which means vegetation will not grow. Alkali Station is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



## DANDELIONS



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## Route Reading

### DANDELIONS

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1. Why did the Bolton family leave Illinois to live in Nebraska Territory?
2. What conversation makes Zoe cry for the first time?
3. How many miles do the Boltons travel per day in their covered wagon?
4. How does the Bolton family get water?
5. Why is Mama happy to see Mrs. Svenson even though they've never met before?
6. Why does Zoe transplant the dandelions?
7. Are dandelions trash or treasure to the Boltons? Why?
8. If you lived in Nebraska Territory during this time in history, what do you think your favorite part would be? What would be your least favorite part?



## **STEM Activity**

### **MINI SOD HOUSE CONSTRUCTION (45 MIN)**

**Goal:** Be the architect of your own soddie using some common cooking ingredients instead of dirt, grass, and plant roots. Building sod walls is big experiment in architecture and engineering; if you run out of time to build the roof, that's ok.

**Supplies:** Graph paper and pencil. **Groceries:** 2 cups plain instant mashed potatoes; 1 cup all-purpose flour; 2 teaspoons table salt; 1 1/2 cups water; 1 large egg; bag of pretzel rods. **Tools:** Large mixing bowl, small mixing bowl, wooden spoon, spatula, bench scraper and/or pizza cutter, rolling pin, clean flat surface.

#### **Activity:**

1. Whisk potato flakes, flour, and salt together in large bowl. Whisk water and egg together in separate bowl. Add water mixture to potato mixture and stir with wooden spoon until fully combined and mixture forms dough ball.
2. Let sit for 3 minutes while you plan your sod house design on your graph paper. Decide how much dough the pretzel rods can hold up without breaking. Draw your soddie blueprint on the graph paper in the form of a rectangle.
3. Turn out dough onto lightly-floured surface and knead until dough has texture of Play-Doh. Dust with flour and let rest for 5 minutes while you wash the dirty dishes.
4. Divide dough into 5 equal pieces. Roll pieces into flat sheets of dough. Using your pizza cutter or bench scraper as your "plow," cut strips of the "sod" to make bricks out of. Alternating rows of bricks crosswise and lengthwise, build the walls of your "soddie" along the lines of your blueprint on your graph paper. Lay your pretzel ridgepole on the two shorter walls. Consider how you will need to cut the sod bricks to make the roof, or, if you have time, build your sod roof, too.

**Modifier:** Think about where you will cut windows and a door in your sod walls. Also, think about the interior and design where the furniture will go. Where will the bed go? Where will the stove go? What other comforts or necessities does your soddie have room for?

## **More Resources**

- "Building a Sod House." Nebraska Public Media.  
<https://www.nebraskastudies.org/en/1850-1874/the-challenges-of-the-plains/building-a-sod-house/>
- "Sod House Construction." History Nebraska.  
<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/sod-house-construction>
- "Life in a Sod House." OurStory: Activities. Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.  
<https://amhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/sodhouse/more.html>



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