



Chicago Historical Society



PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES

The Impact of Transportation

Grade level: Middle school through high school

Estimated time: Two class periods

Topic: A Century of Progress World's Fair, 1933-34

Subtopic: Transportation

Teacher background information

World's fairs and expositions held in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries celebrated the past while introducing visions of the future. A Century of Progress World's Fair focused on the advances of civilization during the century following Chicago's incorporation. The fair highlighted new technology, specifically technology focusing on the role of transportation in modern society.

Key concepts

Civic pride, escapism, urban planning, capitalism, and technological advancement

Key questions

Why were different modes of transportation so visible at the fair? How were they integrated into the fair? What was the predominant mode of transportation highlighted at the fair?

Goal of this lesson

Using photographs of the fair, students will learn about the different forms of transportation on display at the Century of Progress.

Objectives

1. Students will analyze the importance of technology and transportation at the A Century of Progress by interpreting photographs of fair buildings and exhibits.
2. Students will identify the different modes of transportation on display at the fair.
3. Students will discuss how the variety of transportation modes displayed promoted escapism and travel.

Materials

Master copies of all photographs and handouts are provided.

1. "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles at the A Century of Progress World's Fair of 1933-34" worksheet
2. "Transportation Photograph Analysis" worksheet
3. Photographs from the A Century of Progress World's Fair
 - a. View of the fair showing the Royal Scot and Burlington trains exhibits, the Nash Motors Building, and the Goodyear blimp



- b. Chrysler Motors Building and racetrack
- c. Ford Motors Building interior exhibit
- d. Nash Motors Building with the Travel and Transport Building in the background and the blimp flying overhead
- e. Zephyr exhibit

Procedures

1. Break students into small groups and ask them to complete the “Planes, Trains, and Automobiles” worksheet. (This activity is detailed and may be too time consuming for an in-class assignment. Depending on your students’ skill level, you may want to either divide the worksheet questions among group members or assign the worksheet for homework prior to beginning the lesson.) The list of materials under “Additional resources” will guide students who are struggling to locate answers to the worksheets. After students complete the worksheet, hold a class discussion about the significance of transportation to the organizers of the Century of Progress. Complete the worksheet and discussion before beginning the photo analysis activity.
2. This lesson provides five photographs for students to analyze while working in small groups. You can distribute one photograph, or the entire set, to each group. Ask students to work together to complete the “Transportation Photo Analysis” worksheet.
3. Ask each group to share their findings with the entire class. Afterward hold a class discussion. Discussion questions may include:
 - a. What are the types of transportation that one could see at the fair?
 - b. Which exhibits would students have liked to visit? Why?
 - c. Why was transportation significant to the Century of Progress?
 - d. Why did President Roosevelt ask organizers to extend the fair into a second year?

Suggestions for student assessment

Use the “Planes, Trains and Automobiles” worksheet and the “Transportation Photograph Analysis” worksheet to assess student learning. You may also develop a rubric to assess the students’ participation in group work and discussion.

Extension activities

1. Ask students to research President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s comments about the Century of Progress, the controversy surrounding the fair grounds and buildings after its supposed closure in October 1933, and the eventual decision to reopen the fair for a second season. Structure a class debate. Ask one group to defend an argument in favor of extending the fair into a second season and ask a group to oppose the reopening of the fair.
2. Have students write a “personal” journal in which they imagine themselves as fair visitors. Remind students to make their journal believable by including their character’s name, age, gender, and hometown. Students should describe their experiences at the fair and address what the fair meant to them. They should mention the exhibits they enjoyed most and explain their reaction to the various attractions. This creative writing assignment can also be used to assess student learning. Refer to the America Online website, listed under “Internet resources,” for examples of fair journals.

Additional resources

- Mayer, Harold M. and Richard C. Wade. *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969.
- Rydell, Robert W., John Findling, and Kimberly Pelle. *Fair America: World’s Fairs in the United States*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 2000.
- Talbot-Stanaway, Susan. “The Giant Jewel: 1933-34 World’s Fair” in *A Wild Kind of Boldness: the Chicago History Reader*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Internet resources

America Online

www.members.aol.com/chicfair/links.html

Century of Progress Exposition (excerpts from the Official Guide Book of the Fair and illustrated by exposition postcards)
www.hometown.aol.com/chicfair

Chicago Historical Society
www.chicagohistory.org

Chicago Public Library,
www.chipublib.org/CPL.html

European Sport Pilot Association (aviation history), www.esparacing.com

Museum of Science and Industry (information about the Zephyr), www.msichicago.org

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Science

State Goal 13: Understand the relationships among science, technology, and society in historical and contemporary contexts.

Social Science

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

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Answer key to the “Planes, Trains, and Automobiles at the A Century of Progress World’s Fair of 1933–34” worksheet

Please note: Student answers will vary, but may include the following information:

Air Travel

1. *What attractions and exhibits at the “Century of Progress” were associated with aviation?*

Several blimps visited the fair including the Graf Zeppelin and the Goodyear. Seaplane rides were available, and the Skyride did not actually fly but mimicked flight. A Boeing monoplane hung in the “Dome” of the Travel and Transport building, which also displayed other old-fashioned planes.

2. *Who was Italo Balbo? What contribution(s) did he make to Chicago?*

Italo Balbo was the Minister of Air for Italy. In 1933, he planned an impressive display of Italian flying ability. The display involved building twenty-five, specially equipped, twin-hulled Savoia-Marchetti SM.55X flying boats and flying them in formation across Europe to Chicago’s Century of Progress and back to Rome. The stunt became known as the Italian Formation Flight of 1933. Balbo’s Column, a gift from the Italian government, commemorates General Balbo’s trans-Atlantic flight to Chicago. This column was removed from the ruins of a Roman temple in Ostia and still stands near Soldier Field.

Trains

3. *What exhibits associated with railroad travel could be found at the Fair?*

Burlington Railroad exhibited a deluxe passenger train consisting of a giant locomotive and six other modern cars on 600 feet of track. Old-fashioned railroad equipment was also displayed, including a “tea kettle” engine from the 1880s. Record-breaking speed engines, such as the Royal Scot, were also on display. The Chicago Northwestern Line sponsored a “Yesterday and Today.” Milwaukee Roads’ electric locomotive; the Baltimore and Ohio

locomotive, named “President Cleveland”; and the famous war engine, named the “General,” were also on display.

4. *What was the Zephyr? Explain its place both at the Century of Progress and in Chicago’s history.*

The Zephyr (originally known as the Burlington Zephyr and renamed the Pioneer Zephyr) was the first of nine “shovelnose” streamlined trains built for the Chicago Burlington & Quincy (CB&Q) railroad. The Zephyr was an ultra-modern, fast, sleek, efficient train. It was made in an effort to revive railroad passenger travel and became popular, fashionable, and profitable. It made a famous, record-breaking “dawn-to-dusk” trip from Denver to Chicago on May 26, 1934, in just over thirteen hours, breaking the record for the longest non-stop run at the fastest average speed. Thousands of people viewed the Zephyr at the fair during 1934. It was given to the Museum of Science and Industry in 1960, and today the beautifully restored Zephyr is on display in the museum.

Automobiles

5. *What exhibits at the “Century of Progress” were associated with automobiles?*

The Nash Motors building featured a glass tower with moving cars, and the Ford Motor Company rotunda resembled graduated, internally meshed gears that stood the equivalent of ten stories high and measured 210 feet in diameter at the base. General Motors, Chrysler, and Firestone also all sponsored fair buildings. Most of the automobile company buildings were located near the Travel and Transport building, which featured a variety of transportation displays across time.

Name (s) _____ Date _____

**PLANES, TRAINS, AND AUTOMOBILES AT THE
A CENTURY OF PROGRESS WORLD'S FAIR OF 1933-34**

Directions Transportation was one of the major exhibition themes at Chicago's second world's fair. Answer the questions below about the three prominent forms of transportation presented at the Century of Progress World's Fair of 1933-34. Remember to cite your source(s). You may find the information you need either in printed sources or on the Internet.

Planes

1. What Century of Progress attractions and exhibits were associated with aviation?

2. Who was Italo Balbo? What contribution(s) did he make to Chicago?

Trains

3. What Century of Progress attractions and exhibits were associated with railroads?

4. What was the Zephyr? Explain its place both at the Century of Progress and in Chicago's history.

Automobiles

5. What Century of Progress attractions and exhibits were associated with automobiles?

Name (s) _____ Date _____

TRANSPORTATION PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

- 1. Study the photograph for two minutes. Form overall impressions of the entire photograph and the individual items in it.
- 2. Use the chart below to list the people, objects, and activities in the photograph.

PEOPLE	OBJECTS	ACTIVITIES

3. Based on what you have observed, list three things you might infer about this photograph.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

4. Make one observation about transportation and the A Century of Progress World's Fair from your analysis of this photograph.

5. What questions does this photograph raise in your mind?



View of Chicago's A Century of Progress World's Fair showing the Nasb Motors Building, the Royal Scot and Burlington Train Exhibits, and the Goodyear Blimp, 1933-34.

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Chrysler Motors Building and racetrack at Chicago's A Century of Progress World's Fair, 1933-34.

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Exhibit in the Ford Motors Building at Chicago's A Century of Progress World's Fair, 1933-34.

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Nash Motors Building at Chicago's A Century of Progress World's Fair, 1933-34. The Travel and Transport Building is pictured in the background.

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Zephyr exhibit at Chicago's A Century of Progress World's Fair, 1933-34.

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