

WORKING ON THE RAILROAD

Grade Level: 3 to 5

IN THIS LESSON

Students will learn about the challenges of working on the railroad and create their own railroad posters. They will also learn about the establishment of time zones and plot their own time zone trip.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop historical empathy with the people of the past
- To develop oral presentation skills
- To make connections between the past and the present

ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

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

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

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

SOCIAL SCIENCE

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

SUGGESTED ARTIFACTS

Vintage railroad posters (reproductions available at the Chicago History Museum store, <http://www.chicagotogo.org/posters2.html>)

Railroad maps

Railroad advertisements

Railroad postcards

“Working on the Railroad” sound recording

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

“Working on the Railroad” lyrics (at end of lesson)

Time Zone Trip worksheets (at end of lesson)

United States topographical maps

Chart paper

Construction paper

Art supplies

Push pins

Yarn

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This lesson was developed and written by Helene Barnett.

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ACTIVITY

DAY 1

1. Distribute copies of the lyrics for "Working on the Railroad." If possible, play a recording of the song. Have a class discussion about what students think the lyrics mean. Brainstorm a list of what students think it would have been like to work on the railroads.
2. Divide students into small groups. Give each group a United States topographical map along with a railroad map of 1869. Have students match up the maps in order to discover the geographical challenges of laying track in different parts of the country. Have students rate the obstacles from most difficult to least.
3. Resume whole class discussion and gather student challenges on a large sheet of chart paper.

DAY 2

1. Display or distribute copies of vintage railroad posters. Students can all look at one poster or you can break the class into small groups and give a different poster to each group.
2. Post the following questions on the board: What railroad circulated this ad? What is the destination of the train? Does the poster make you want to ride the train? Why or why not? How do the colors, pictures, and words make you feel about the train?
3. Ask volunteers to share their observations or have each small group give a short oral presentation of their findings.
4. Have students create their own train poster using an imaginary train line and a favorite destination. This can also be assigned as a home connection.

DAY 3

1. In a quick 5 to 10 minute lecture, introduce students to the idea of standardized time and its origin with the railroads. See Additional Resources for more information.
2. Break students into small groups. Distribute copies of the Time Zone Trip worksheet. Using their math books, a modern Amtrak schedule, and a time zone map, students should plot a train trip through all four time zones (Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific) and calculate the total number of hours the trip would take.
3. Have students give an oral presentation about their trips and why they chose the destinations they did. If possible, have kids mark their trips on a wall map of the United States using push pins and yarn.

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ASSESSMENT

See the teamwork rubric calculator at Teachnology.com.

http://teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/teamwork/

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Have students imagine they are taking the cross-country train trip they plotted on day 3 and write a story about what cities they traveled through and what sights they saw out the window.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

From the January/February 1999 Issue 4 of "Middle Level Learning," (a supplement to National Council for the Social Studies publication): "1883: Life in the US is still slow-paced enough that each town sets its own time. New Orleans, for instance, is 23 minutes behind Baton Rouge. Under pressure from the railroads, the federal government creates time zones, and soon all watches are synchronized."

<http://www.webexhibits.org/daylightsaving/d.html>

This site gives an overview of the origins of standardized time in the U.S. and other places in the world as well as information about daylight savings time.

http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/daylight_time.php

The U.S. Naval Observatory website provides a brief explanation of when standardized time became law and also of daylight savings time.

I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD

Origin unknown

**I've been working on the railroad
All the livelong day
I've been working on the railroad
Just to pass the time away**

**Can't you hear the whistle blowing
Rise up so early in the morn
Can't you hear the captain shouting
Dinah, blow your horn**

**Dinah, won't you blow
Dinah, won't you blow
Dinah, won't you blow your horn
Dinah, won't you blow
Dinah, won't you blow
Dinah, won't you blow your horn**

**Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah
Someone's in the kitchen I know
Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah
Strumming on the old banjo, and singing**

**Fie, fi, fiddly i o
Fie, fi, fiddly i o
Fie, fi, fiddly i o
Strumming on the old banjo**

TIME ZONE TRIP

Plan your trip through all four time zones!
At the end, count the total number of hours.

1. Depart from _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
Arrive at _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
This leg of the trip took a total of _____ hours.

2. Depart from _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
Arrive at _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
This leg of the trip took a total of _____ hours.

3. Depart from _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
Arrive at _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
This leg of the trip took a total of _____ hours.

4. Depart from _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
Arrive at _____ (city)
At _____ (am/pm) in the _____ Time Zone
This leg of the trip took a total of _____ hours.

Now add up the total number of hours on your trip! _____