

Rediscovering America: Railroads, Robberies & Rebels:

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: U.S. History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

Created by robber barons and preyed upon by bandits, railroads in the 1800s were about money and speed — hallmarks of the swiftly approaching new century.

Onscreen Questions and Activities

- Pre-viewing questions:
 - How did the railroad industry change the way that we keep time in the United States? (*In order to create accurate timetables, the railroad industry established the four standard time zones that we use today.*)
 - What is a gandy dancer? (*A gandy dancer or John Henry was a worker who moved and aligned sections of railroad tracks.*)
 - Discuss the effects of the railroad on the development of business and culture in the United States. Weigh the pros and cons of the rapid modernization that accompanied train travel.
 - Activity: Locate the train station nearest your community. Find out when it was built and how it affected the development of your town.
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

Students will understand:

- Railroads function to various degrees in different parts of the country as a means of travel.
- Good consumers compare costs and benefits of traveling by various means.

Materials

- *Rediscovering America: Railroads, Robberies & Rebels* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Detailed maps of the United States

- Information about the cost and the time involved in traveling by train, bus, and plane between two points in the United States (Internet access will help)

Procedures

1. This project requires students to look at their hometown from the perspective of transportation options and to determine what option, if any, the railroads offer. With maps readily available, ask each student to select as a travel destination a large city at least 500 miles from where he or she lives. Each student's objective is to figure out the best way of getting to that destination and back. Options they should look into include train, bus, and plane.
2. Lead a class brainstorming session on how students can initiate research on the best way for them to travel roundtrip between home and their target cities at least 500 miles away. The goal is to help students determine, first of all, which modes of transportation are available to them for their imaginary trips. This information depends on what modes of transportation leave students' hometown and what modes of transportation go into the target cities. Will students be able to take one mode of transportation straight through, or will students have to combine modes to get to their destinations?
3. Explain to students that they may use toll-free numbers or Internet sites to get the specific information they need. Advise students to be sure to gather the same information regardless of which transportation provider they are contacting:
 - Fares and discounts on fares if certain conditions are met (see also #6)
 - Classes of service (e.g., coach versus business class in a plane; Amtrak versus Metroliner versus Acela when traveling by train in some parts of the country)
 - Departure and arrival times
 - Any change of vehicle en route
 - Frequency of service (if a traveler misses one departure, how long will he or she have to wait for the next departure?)
 - Restrictions on travel at certain fares (see also #1)
 - Door-to-door travel time (from student's home to where he or she will stay in destination city) as opposed to the length of the plane, bus, or train ride itself
 - Other advantages or disadvantages of a particular mode of transportation or a particular carrier
4. When students have collected enough information about each mode of transportation, encourage them to work as a group to figure out how to evaluate what they've collected. What kind of graphic organizer or computer tool would most help them compare and contrast the information?
5. Once each student organizes all the information, he or she should study it to see which mode of transportation offers the best fares, the quickest trip, and the greatest convenience. Is there a clear-cut best choice (or only choice!) for traveling from home to the city in question, or does the decision become complicated?

6. Give each student an opportunity to explain in an oral presentation how he or she has decided to travel from home to the destination city and back. If several students have selected the same destination city, give them all a chance to present at the same time. At some point in each presentation, the student(s) should clearly state whether it is possible to travel between the two places by train and, if so, why that option is or is not attractive.
7. As a conclusion for this project, encourage students to gather statistics about train travel in the United States today and a hundred years ago. What is being predicted for train travel in the United States in the 21st century? What generalizations, if any, can we make about railroads yesterday, today, and tomorrow?

Discussion Questions

1. What does the title of the program, "Railroads, Robbers, and Rebels," mean? Are there any industries or businesses today that could also include the words "robbers and rebels?" If yes, which ones? If not, discuss your reasons.
2. How have trains influenced the way we live today? What changes did the train bring to American society? What if the railroads had never existed? What would this have meant to travel, communication, transportation, and the economy? What impact do you think the construction of the railroad had on the environment?
3. What is meant by the sentence, "As General Grant became President Grant, railroad finance entered a squalid phase of monopoly capitalism?" Are there ever instances where monopolies are beneficial to society?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Student gives extremely well ordered presentation with clearly stated travel preference; gathers all the suggested information for each mode of transportation; uses consistent loud voice and good eye contact
- 2 points: Student gives adequately ordered presentation with clearly stated travel preference; gathers most of the suggested information for each mode of transportation; occasionally muffled voice and sometimes absence of eye contact
- 1 point: Student gives poorly ordered presentation without clearly stated travel preference; gathers little or none of the suggested information for each mode of transportation; voice not loud enough and eye contact absent.

Vocabulary

capitalist

Definition: A person who has money (capital) invested in a business.

Context: The holding company, the trust, and the monopolies stretching all across the country were new things; the modern corporation came into being with the railroad; internationally financed, continental in its reach and with it a new kind of capitalist.



depression

Definition: In economics, a period of low economic activity or output in an industrialized country, bringing rising levels of unemployment and business failures.

Context: Jay Cook's collapse brought on the depression of 1874.

holding company

Definition: A corporation whose primary purpose is having a controlling interest in the stocks of other companies.

Context: The holding company, the trust, and the monopolies stretching all across the country were new things; the modern corporation came into being with the railroad; internationally financed, continental in its reach and with it a new kind of capitalist.

monopoly

Definition: An economic condition whereby a single seller or producer has exclusive ownership or control over the distribution and sales of his or her product.

Context: As General Grant became President Grant, railroad finance entered a squalid phase of monopoly capitalism

regulated

Definition: To be under the control of law or a legal authority.

Context: Today's markets are regulated. Unregulated trading in railroad stock after the Civil War led to cutting corners, collapses, monopolies, and fraud.

transcontinental

Definition: Extending or going across a continent, as a railway system.

Context: It was the age of imperial, transcontinental roads - the Cairo to Cape Town, the Trans-Siberian, and the Orient Express.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – U.S. History: Understands how the industrial revolution, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed American lives and led to regional tensions.
- History – U.S. History: Understands how the rise of big business, heavy industry, and mechanized farming transformed American society.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
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