

# Transcontinental Railroad

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### Preview of the Main Idea:

By 1854, there were 15,675 miles of railroad track in the United States, but Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the east bank of the Mississippi River was the end of the line. The building of the transcontinental railroad was undertaken to link the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of North America, thereby providing safer, easier and more economical means of moving people, raw materials, and finished goods from the Mississippi River to California. One byproduct of that great venture was the need for 30,000 laborers to lay the track. These job opportunities were one way society could meet the needs of a diverse population, but finding enough workers was difficult. Many of the transcontinental railroad workers were immigrants seeking employment in a new world.

### Connection to the Curriculum:

This activity may be used with social studies or language arts.

Teaching Level: Grades 5-8

### Connection to National Geography Standards:

The World in Spatial Terms- #1 How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process and report information from a spatial perspective.

Human Systems- #11 The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface.

Environment and Society- #14 How human actions modify the physical environment.

### Connection to 5 Themes of Geography:

Location, Human Environment Interaction, Movement

Time: 2-3 class period

Materials Required: Four continuum statements

Four sticky dots per student

Student copies of Building the Transcontinental Railroad by Monica Halpern

Organizers: Problem-Idea Maps, Webs, U.S. Maps (See attached)

Pencils

Markers (Ch. 2 group only)

Blank paper available to construct timelines and lists

LCD projector and screen

Inspiration software

Primary Question:

How does a society maintain the welfare of a diverse population?

Secondary Questions:

Where was the transcontinental railroad built?

Why was it built?

What groups of people were involved in its construction?

How did this project change the lives of people in America?

What reading strategies did you use to complete your activity?

Suggested Procedure:

*Anticipatory Set:* Write the following statements at the tops of four pieces of paper and post each statement in one corner of the room. Create a vertical continuum with “Disagree” at the bottom and “Agree” at the top on each sheet. Have each student write his/her initials on four colored adhesive dots. Divide your class into fourths. Send one group to each corner and have each student place his/her sticky dot on the continuum. After a brief wait, have the groups rotate. Repeat two more times.

Statement One:

The transcontinental railroad was built to carry people between continents.

Statement Two:

Change improves people's lives.

Statement Three:

Diverse groups need each other.

Statement Four:

Iron horses can build empires.

After each student places his/her dots, read each statement aloud and call on different students (2 or 3 volunteers for each statement) using initials to briefly explain the placement of their dots.

*Lesson:* Teacher reads aloud the introduction, modeling her thought processes as she reads. Students are then divided into groups of four (varies based on class size) for a jigsaw activity. Each group reads an assigned chapter of the text and then confers on the assigned activity.

Students reading chapter 1 complete a problem-solution idea-map. Students reading chapter 2 use a map outline of the United States and colored marking pens to locate the route of the transcontinental railroad.

Students reading chapter 3 complete a reading web with "workers" as the hub and at least six radiating spokes.

Students reading chapter 4 complete a reading web with "Native Americans" as the hub and at least five radiating spokes.

Students reading chapter 5 make a positive-negative timeline beginning in 1865 and ending in 1868. Include the six most important events.

Students reading chapter 6 will complete a list of changes that occurred as a result of the transcontinental railroad.

The six expert groups number off in fours. Four new groups with at least one student from each expert group gather to share their information. As a culminating activity, teacher calls class back together with computer projector and Inspiration, using the "Understanding Events" template. As a class, decide how to organize the information acquired. (e.g., Use "Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad" as the main idea, and "Economics," "Physical Features," and "Humans" as subtopics for organization of details).

To close, revisit the four opening statements and ask if there are any students who would like to change their dot placements and explain why.

Assessment:

Maps, organizers, lists created by cooperative groups.

Class discussion.

Inspiration template.

Extension #3 (no paragraph requirement) as a quiz (optional).

*Extensions:*

1. Students use literature circles to discuss The Iron Dragon Never Sleeps by Stephen Krensky.
2. Students prepare an oral presentation about one of the following key figures in the construction of the transcontinental railroad: Collis Huntington, Mark Hopkins, Leland Stanford, Charles Crocker, or Ted Judah.
3. Place this quotation on the board.

“And the Iron Horse,  
the earth-shaker,  
the fire-breather...  
shall build an empire.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ask students to agree or disagree and write a five-paragraph expository in support of their decisions.

4. Student creates a political cartoon about the building of the transcontinental railroad.
5. Students work together to create a poster advertising the first transcontinental railroad. Encourage them to include information about the sights and experiences of traveling from San Francisco to New York in 1869.

Bibliography:

Books:

Ambrose, Stephen E. *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built*

*Transcontinental Railroad 1863-1869.* Touchstone Books, 2001.

ISBN: 0743203178.

Summary: *Nothing Like It in the World* is the story of the men who built the transcontinental railroad-- the investors who risked their businesses and money; the politicians who understood its importance; the engineers and surveyors who risked their lives; and the Irish and Chinese immigrants and the other laborers who did the dangerous work on the tracks.

Blumberg, Rhoda. *Full Steam Ahead: The Race to Build a Transcontinental Railroad.* Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1996.

ISBN: 0-7922-2715-8

Summary: With photographs taken at the time of the railroad's construction, this book thoroughly details the building of the transcontinental railroad from "Crazy Judah's" vision of it to the last spike ceremony.

Fraser, Mary Ann. *Ten Mile Day: And the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad.* Henry Holt & Company, 1996.

ISBN: 0805047034.

Summary: Fraser describes in detail April 28, 1969, when Central Pacific crews laid a record-setting ten miles of track. Building methods, engineering challenges, and people involved, map, and glossary are part of this book.

Gobel, Paul. *Death of the Iron Horse.* Aladdin Paperbooks, 1993.

ISBN: 0689716869

Summary: A tale of courage and pride, this is the true story of the only time an Iron Horse was derailed by Native Americans. Easy reading.

Halpern, Monica. *Building the Transcontinental Railroad.* Washington, D.C. National Geographic Society, 2002.

ISBN: 0-7922-8690-1

Summary: Complete with glossary, subheadings, illustrations, maps, photos, and quotations, this book describes the building of the transcontinental railroad.

Krensky, Stephen. *The Iron Dragon Never Sleeps*. New York: Delacorte Press,

1994. ISBN: 038531170

Summary: In 1867, 10-year-old Winnie meets a Chinese boy close to her age and discovers the role and treatment of his people in building the transcontinental railroad.

Websites:

[www.mindspring.com/~jjlanham/trcc1.htm](http://www.mindspring.com/~jjlanham/trcc1.htm)

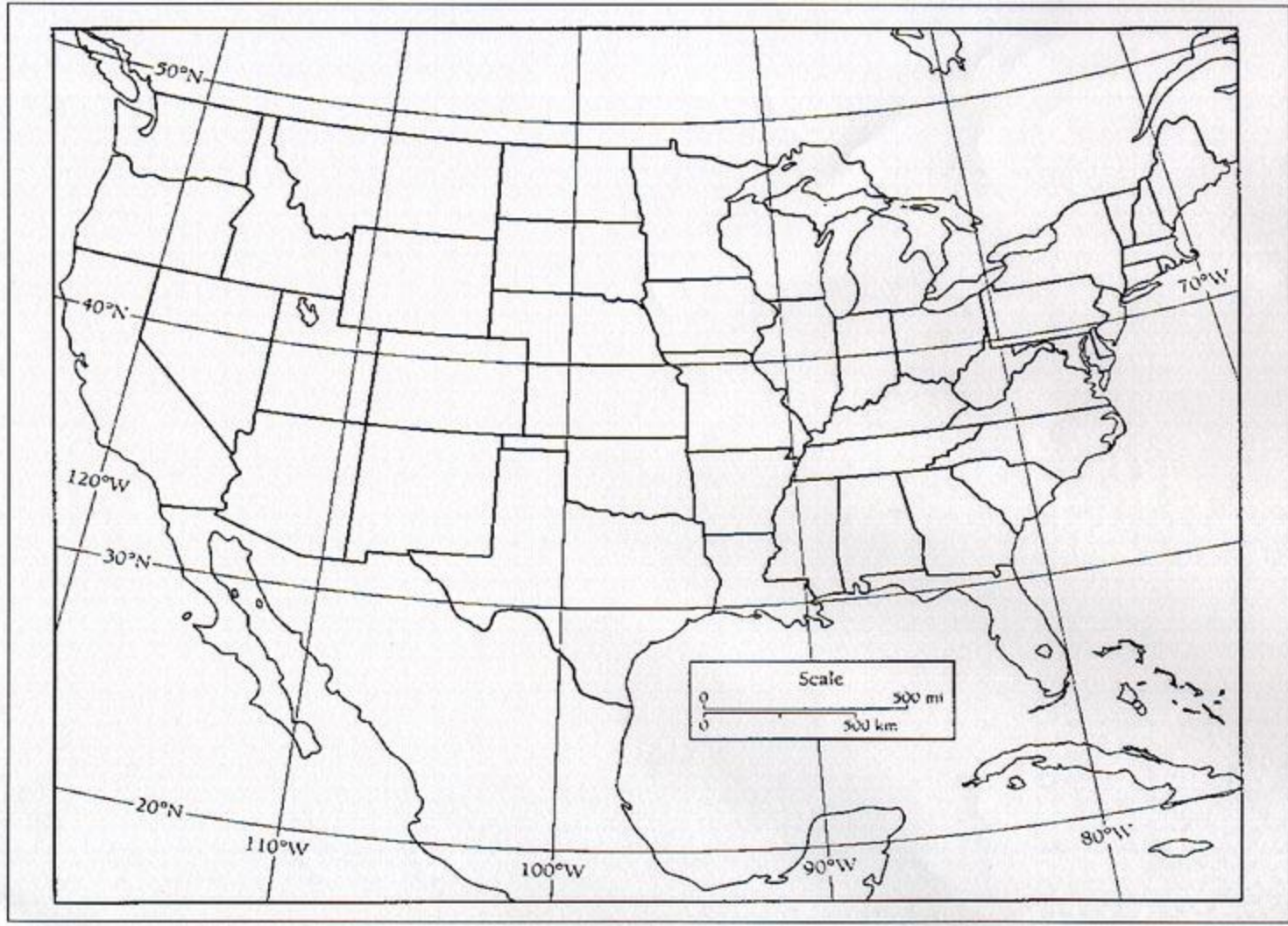
Provides a brief introduction to the railroad and describes why it was built, by whom, and for what reason.

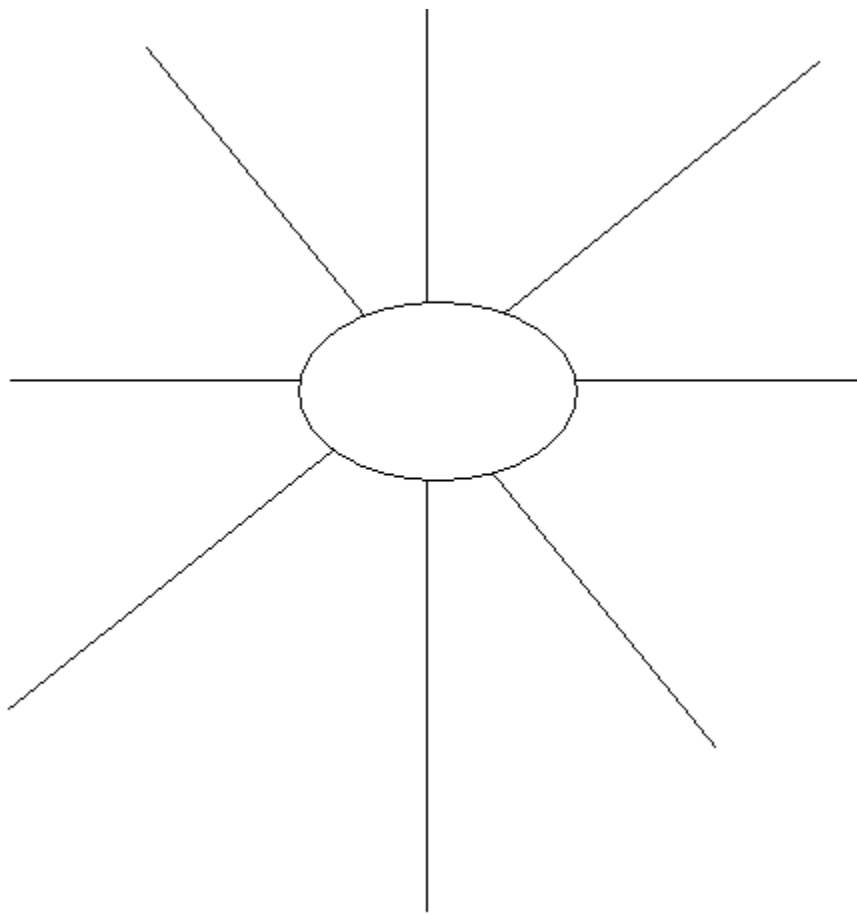
[www.engineeringsuccess.com/Career/Biography/Biographies](http://www.engineeringsuccess.com/Career/Biography/Biographies).

Supplies a profile of the engineer, Theodore Judah, who dreamed of the transcontinental railroad.

PBS Film:

“The Iron Road,” a documentary produced by Neil Goodwin of Peace River Films, is the story of the building of the first railroad link connecting the East to the West.









# Problem


# Solution
