

The Railroads and the American West

Suggested Grade Levels: 7-12

Suggested Days: 2-5

Objectives:

- Students will understand the need for a transcontinental railroad
- Students can analyze the effects of the transcontinental railroad on American life from different perspectives (Asian, American, Native American, and African American)
- Students will be able to explain why the transcontinental railroad is located where it is

Standards Addressed:

Kentucky CAS 2.20: Students understand, analyze, and interpret historical events, conditions, trends, and issues to develop historical perspective.

SS-HS-5.1.1: Students will use a variety of tools (e.g., primary and secondary sources, data, artifacts) to analyze perceptions and perspectives (e.g., gender, race, region, ethnic group, nationality, age, economic status, religion, politics, geographic factors) of people and historical events in the modern world (1500 A.D. to present) and United States History (Reconstruction to present).

Suggested Activities:

1) Map Analysis:

In 1860 did the United States encompass land from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts?

How many states existed in 1860?

Was there any land which was owned by the United States government but which was not yet admitted into the Union as a state?

What is the difference between a state and a territory?

2) Document analysis: Have students read selections of the Homestead act and the Pacific Railway act. Analyze the sources for “Who, What, When, Where, and Why it is significant”

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/five/railact.htm>

<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/five/homestd.htm>

3) Role play: Have students create strategies for the division and usage of land in the west. Students will be divided into teams of Settlers, Land Speculators, and Railway owners. Have each devise a strategy for land use in the west. Give students time to complete their strategies. Have the students present their plans to the class, discuss as a class the problems and conflicts of interest that have arisen.

4) Documentary: American Experience the Transcontinental Railroad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoW0tPACLXE>

If you want to bring your own documentary, you can use the movie theater on the 2nd floor of the Museum at the Historic Railpark on a field trip

For additional resources, visit http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/lesson_plans/lesson01.htm