

Railroad Unit Plan
Grade: 5th
Subject: Social Studies
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Railroads in America



Railroads and locomotives have long fascinated young children. Many children grow up reading “The Little Engine That Could” and watching “Thomas the Tank Engine” on TV. Because this is already a unit of interest, it should be easy to get students excited about railroads in America. This unit is meant to teach students the history of trains in this country, their impact on history, and their current state.

This is an interdisciplinary unit where students will use skills from language arts, and history. This unit is designed for students in the fifth grade, with an age range of between 10 and 11 years old.

Goals

The goal of this unit is to build an understanding of American train history, the impact of trains, and the current status of trains in America.

Objectives

1. Student will list the critical events in the history of the railroad in America.
2. Students will write a report on the impact railroads have had on America.
3. Students will recite the current state of railroads in America using Microsoft PowerPoint software.

Lesson 1-History of American Railroads

Time: 50 minutes

Materials:

- Computers with Internet access
- Lesson 1 Worksheet

Procedure:

1. The teacher will gain the student’s attention and outline what the lesson will be about today. They will tell the students that they will be learning about the history of the American railroad today.
2. The teacher will ask the students what they know about railroads and how long they think railroads have been around.

3. The teacher will demonstrate how to open an internet browser and type in a website address.
4. The teacher will then explain that each student will be receiving a worksheet and the students job is to use the given websites to find the answers to the questions on the worksheet.
5. The teacher will hand out the worksheet (which asks questions about the history of the railroad from the required websites) and read the worksheet directions out loud.
6. The students will then individually browse the websites and respond to the worksheet questions by themselves.
7. After all groups have completed their worksheets the teacher will collect them and will use the answer key and grading rubric to assess the activity after the students have been released.

Internet Resources:

Railroads in American History

http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_073400_railroads.htm

National Railroad Museum

<http://www.nationalrrmuseum.org/collections-020-historical-outline.html>

Lesson 2: The Impact of railroads on American history

Time: 50 minutes

Equipment and Materials:

- Computers with Internet access and Microsoft Word
- Lesson 2 Worksheet

Procedure:

1. Teacher will gain the students attention and outline what the lesson will be about today. They will tell students that they will be learning about the impact of railroads on American history today.
2. The teacher will ask the students if they think the railroad has affected American history in any significant way. They will also ask which war was the first to be affected by railroads.
3. The teacher will demonstrate how create a new document and save a document in Microsoft Word.
4. The teacher will then explain that each student will be receiving a worksheet and the students job is to use the given websites to find the answers to the questions on the worksheet.
5. Teacher will handout the worksheet (which asks questions about the impact of the railroad on American history) and read aloud the directions.
6. Each student will use the required websites to find the answers to the worksheet and use Microsoft Word to write their reports. After completing their report each student should print out a draft and hand it in to the teacher.

7. After all students have submitted their reports and the students have been released, the teacher will use the answer key and grading rubric to assess the activity. The reports should be placed in the students writing folder.

Internet Resources:

Railroads in the Civil War

<http://www.gatewaynmra.org/articles/civil-war1.htm>

Railroads in American History

http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_073400_railroads.htm

Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad

www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/tcrr/peopleevents/e_impact.html

Lesson 3: Current state of railroads in America

Time: 50 minutes

Equipment and Materials:

- Computers with internet access and Microsoft PowerPoint
- Lesson 2 Worksheets

Procedure:

1. The teacher will give opening remarks to gain the student's attention. The teacher will mention that they will be learning about the current state of the railroad in America and creating a presentation about the role of railroads today.
2. The teacher will ask the students if they have ever rode a train. The teacher will ask the students what they think the main purpose of trains are today. The teacher will ask the students if people still use trains as a form of transportation.
3. The teacher will demonstrate how to create a new PowerPoint document and choose a template. The teacher will also go over how to insert text and pictures.
4. The teacher will handout the lesson 3 worksheet.
5. Students will read about Amtrak and the current state of railroads in America and then answer the questions on the worksheet.
6. The teacher should briefly discuss the basic design of a PowerPoint presentation and show students how to search the internet for train images by going to www.google.com and clicking on image search.
7. After all students have finished reading about Amtrak and filling out the worksheets, the teacher should assign them to groups of 4. In these groups they will design a presentation using Microsoft PowerPoint. Among themselves they need to decide who the designer and presenter will be. The other two group members will be the think tank.
8. The group should work together using the guidelines and be ready to present their work at the next class meeting.

Guidelines for PowerPoint presentations

- The first slide should be an introduction to the topic. There should be a title and the names of all group members
- There should be appropriate pictures related to railroads and trains to break up the text throughout.
- There should be a minimum of five PowerPoint slides

Internet Resources:

Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania

<http://www.rrmuseumpa.org/about/rrstoday/rrstoday1.htm>

Google

www.google.com

Lesson 3-B: Group PowerPoint Presentations

Time: 50 minutes

Equipment and Materials:

- Computers with PowerPoint
- An LCD projector to project presentations (if available)

Procedure:

1. The teacher should create the order of group presentations.
2. At the appropriate time each group's presenter will present their group's work.
3. After each presentation time should be made for at least two questions.

Reward: A field trip to a local railroad museum would be a nice capstone for learning about train history. Students would be able to see and touch real trains, and railroads which should help them remember this unit.

Links to local railroad museums:

<http://www.wilmingtonrailroadmuseum.org/>

<http://www.gsmr.com/>

<http://www.trainweb.org/cpd13/museums.html>

Note to Teachers

- This unit plan was designed for 5th graders.
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- You are welcome to use this unit in your classes but I request that you acknowledge the work of the author and don't use it for profit.

Lesson 1 Worksheet

Directions: Answer the following questions by visiting the required websites. Be sure to explain your answer as necessary.

Website:

Railroads in American history website published by Houghton Mifflin

http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_073400_railroads.htm

1. When did railroads first appear in the United States and what were the other competing modes of transportation?
2. In what decade did Arkansas, California, and Texas build their first railroad lines?
3. In 1840 the United States had almost 3,000 miles of railroad track. How many miles did all of Europe have at this same time?

Website:

National Railroad Museum

<http://www.nationalrrmuseum.org/collections-020-historical-outline.html>

4. Why did passenger service decline on the American railroad?
5. The railroads, as we know them, could not have been constructed without substantial assistance from the U.S. government. Is the U.S. government also responsible for the demise of passenger rail service?

Lesson 2 Worksheet

Directions: Write a short report on the social and economic impact of railroads in the United States. Use the following websites to find your information. Be sure to address the following questions in your report.

Website:

Railroads and the Civil War

<http://www.gatewaynmra.org/articles/civil-war1.htm>

6. Did railroads have an effect on the outcome of the Civil War? If so how and why?

Website:

Railroads in U.S. History

http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_073400_railroads.htm

7. Merchants of what 3 Eastern US cities sought westward expansion of the railroads? Why do you think these merchants wanted to expand the railroad?

Website:

Impact of the Transcontinental Railroad

www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/tcrr/peopleevents/e_impact.html

8. Why do people say “the world grew smaller” with the completion of the railroad?
9. The transcontinental railroad was not a good thing for all groups in the United States. Name one social group whose culture was hurt by the railroad.

Lesson 3 Worksheet

Directions: The first half of the period will be spent completing the worksheet and the second half will be spent designing PowerPoint presentations. Find the answers to the following questions and write then down on this worksheet. Compile all of the answers into a PowerPoint presentation.

Websites:

<http://www.rrmuseumpa.org/about/rrstoday/rrstoday1.htm>

1. Do only men work for the railroads today?
2. What is the more common name of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation and does it still carry mail?
3. How many employees does the National Railroad Passenger Association have and when was it started?
4. How much more fuel-efficient are trains than trucks?
5. What are three things which are transported using freight trains these days?

Guidelines for PowerPoint presentations

- The first slide should be an introduction to the topic. There should be a title and the names of all group members
- There should be appropriate pictures related to railroads and trains to break up the text throughout.
- There should be a minimum of five PowerPoint slides

Answer Keys and Rubrics for Railroads in America

Lesson 1

Note to teachers:

- Grading this section should be straight forward since most of the answers are objective.
- You may need to use some discretion when grading question 5.
- Depending on the quality of the writing, you may find it necessary to require a student to rewrite their report.

Answer Key

1. Railroads first appeared in the US in the 1820s. Other competing modes of transportation were canals and river steamboats.
2. Arkansas, California and Texas all built their first railroads in the 1850s.
3. In 1840 Europe had only 1,800 miles of railroad.
4. Passenger service on railroads declined because more people were riding in automobiles, buses, and airplanes instead.
5. This question could be answered in a number of ways depending on the facts used to backup the answer. It could be argued that the U.S. was responsible for passenger rail services demise if the student references the fact that President Eisenhower put a lot of money into the Interstate Highway System. On the other hand, it would also be correct to say the U.S. government is what saved passenger rail service with the creation of Amtrak.

Grading Rubric

Score			
1	2	3	4
Student didn't answer more than one question properly	Groups answered one question incorrectly	All questions were answered correctly but no supporting evidence was used in question 5.	All questions were answered correctly and proper evidence was used in question 5

Lesson 2

Note to teachers:

- You will need to use your own discretion when grading this report.
- As you know the grading of writing is subjective. The content of their papers is included below but each student is responsible for the quality of their writing. Only you can judge the quality of their writing.

Answer Key

1. The railroads had a great effect on the outcome of the Civil War. Trains were used to transport soldiers, supplies, and food much faster than any other form of transportation of the time. Over 2/3 of the rails in the United States at the time were in states loyal to the Union. The train tracks the confederacy did have access to were not standardized so many were not available to be used with all trains.
2. Merchants from Baltimore, Boston, and Charleston were greatly in favor of westward railroad expansion because the west represented a yet untapped market.
3. People say the world became smaller because the coasts were connected. Instead of taking months it only took a week to go from New York to San Francisco. The transcontinental railroad allowed for the transport of people, ideas, mail, and goods in a quicker more efficient manner.
4. As a result of the transcontinental railroad many Indians were displaced and would soon be forced onto reservations. Many buffalo herds, a major part of the Indian culture were also destroyed by sport-hunters.

Grading Rubric

Score			
1	2	3	4
Student did not address more than one question in their report and/or writing quality was poor	Student did not address one question correctly and writing quality was poor	All questions were addressed correctly and writing quality was good	All questions were addressed correctly and writing quality was excellent

Lesson 3

Note to teachers:

You will need to use your own discretion when grading the PowerPoint presentation. A basic content outline is included below but each group will be responsible for the quality of the presentation and following the PowerPoint guidelines.

1. Today both men and women are working in the railroad industry.
2. The more common name for the National Railroad Passenger is Amtrak. Amtrak stopped carrying mail in October of 2004.
3. Amtrak has 23,000 employees and was started in 1971.
4. Trains are 3 to 4 times more fuel-efficient than trucks.
5. Trains currently are responsible for transporting large numbers of automobiles, citrus fruits, and coal among other things.

Grading Rubric

Score			
1	2	3	4
Group answered more than one question incorrectly and/or the PowerPoint did not meet the guidelines	Groups answered one question incorrectly and/or the PowerPoint did not meet the guidelines	All questions were answered correctly and the PowerPoint slide guidelines were met	All questions were answered correctly and all of the PowerPoint slides exceeded the guidelines