

Building the Transcontinental Railroad: An Interactive Engineering Adventure

Summary of the Lesson: Working with a partner, students will select one of three possible character roles and make choices that represent experiences that occurred during the building of the transcontinental railroad.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.1

Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text

Learning Objective: Students will be able to...

- describe the problems facing their chosen character.
- Identify hazards that faced workers building the transcontinental railroad

Duration: 40 minutes.

Notes to the teacher:

You will need to have 15 copies of the interactive book, Building the Transcontinental Railroad. There are 3 story paths (Chinese worker, Irish worker, Engineer). The book has a total of 47 choices and 22 possible endings depending upon the character the partners select.

In addition, the partners will need a copy of the handout to use for recording 3 of their choices and the consequences of their choices.

Procedures:

1. Ask students if they know someone who works for the railroad. Encourage volunteers to explain anything they know about the duties of the job. Other students may be able to volunteer information about various jobs on the railroad – conductor, engineer, mechanic, security officers, clerks, etc.
2. Explain that 150 years ago, America took on the challenge to build a railroad across the country. Ask students if they know how long it took to cross America by wagon or horseback. (Answer: 4-6 months)
3. Introduce the word – Transcontinental. Help students take the word apart. Trans = across and continental = part of a major land mass. (Students may be able to name some of the continents and explain that North America is a continent.)

4. Show the book and explain that they will be stepping back in time to read about an adventure that faced the workers who changed everything about travel across America.
5. Distribute the handout and establish the partner readers.
6. Model the activity by reading the opening pages to set the scene. Explain that the partners need to decide whether they will read the adventure of the Chinese worker, the Irish Laborer, or the engineer.
7. Point out that as they read and make choices they will record three of their decisions and the consequences of the choices they made.
8. Allow time for students to read and record their choices.
9. Circulate to help students with unfamiliar words as needed. Encourage students to check the consequences for making a different decision.
10. Ask students to share the results of their adventure.
11. Have students share their ideas about the dangers that workers faced while building the railroad.
12. If time permits, you may want to show the PowerPoint with historic images of the workers building the railroad.
13. Conclude by sharing an interesting fact: When the railroad was done, a trip across America that once took 6 months could be done in 6 days.