

Teaching American History

Fitchburg State College

Western Expansion and Life on the American Frontier

Unit Plan

5 LESSONS

Bob Jones

Fall 2005

United States History

Unit: Transcontinental Railroad

8th grade, could be modified for 5th or 9th

Standards:

Grade 5 Concepts and Skills

2. Interpret timelines of events studied
4. Use maps and globes to identify absolute locations (latitude and longitude). (G)
6. Distinguish between political and topographical maps and identify specialized maps that show information such as population, income, or climate change. (G,H,E)

US History I: The Revolution Through Reconstruction, 1763 – 1877

Economic Growth in the North and South, 1800-1860

USI.27 Explain the importance of the Transportation Revolution of the 19th century (the building of canals, roads, bridges, turnpikes, steamboats, and railroads), including the stimulus it provided to the growth of a Market economy. (H,E)

Topic: “Big Mapping the Transcontinental Railroad”

In this lesson students will create a class “big map” of the Transcontinental Railroad using a variety of maps, including both hard copy and interactive on-line maps. This activity will create a poster map that will hang in the classroom and act as a resource for the remainder of the course. As we progress in our study of US History, this map can be added to and modified. While some students are working on the map, others will take an interactive trip to places along the route as they look today. Still other students will examine primary source material related to the transcontinental railroad.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will trace an outline map of the western United States

- Students will accurately draw the route of the transcontinental railroad labeling important places and geographic features along the route
- Students will construct a timeline of the building of the transcontinental railroad along the bottom of the “big map”
- Students will view stops along the route of the transcontinental railroad as they look today.
- Students will examine and interpret primary sources relating to the railroad.
- Students will successfully work together as a group on each of the activities.

Schedule: Materials and Time:

Time: These activities will take 5 class periods

Introduction/Context: This activity would serve well as an introduction to a short unit on the transcontinental railroad. Using a variety of maps, students will create a map four feet by six feet that will serve as our blueprint of the railroad. To bring the map to life students will take an interactive trip to several sites along the route and see how they look today. Students will also examine primary sources relating to the transcontinental railroad. The students need to be oriented in the concept of “big maps” and need to be provided with a variety of mapping resources.

Big Maps

To produce a base map one needs to slightly enlarge (to the full extent allowed by an eight and one-half by ten inch map) an outline map of the western part of the United States. An overhead transparency is then produced. The transparency is projected onto a piece of 48 inch by 72-inch piece of poster paper hung on the wall. A team of three or four students trace that map and the base map is created. It is important that the overhead projector be stabilized so that it cannot be moved.

In teams of three or four, students make their contributions to the map. One group draws the route of the Union Pacific Railroad, another draws the route of the Central Pacific Railroad. Important stops along the railroad need to be carefully labeled. Different colors are used. Another team of students label mountains and rivers encountered along the route. The fourth group writes a timeline along the bottom of the route.

Depending upon the age of the students, pictures can be drawn on the maps and other features can be added, the more color, the better.

Because only one group at a time can work on the map, three other activities will be going on in class.

Class activities: The rotation of the following activities will take place over four class periods, allowing 1 class for each of the four activities. Unfinished *Analysis Worksheets* should be completed for homework.

1. **“Big Map”**: Explained above.
2. **Contemporary Photo Analysis:**
“Scouting the Route” – group members log on to the pbs site dedicated to the transcontinental railroad: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/tcrr/index.html>. Click on *Special Features* and then *Scouting the Route*. Students go through the 24 pictures featuring shots of the route of the TCRR including fascinating shots of areas of the route that have been abandoned by present day rail. Students must choose three photos and complete a *Photo Analysis Worksheet* for each. The group must decide who will analyze what photos as no two students can analyze the same picture. Each student will share one photo with the entire class in our concluding activity.
3. **Historical Photo Analysis: Two options:**
 - * **Option A**
“The Overland Trail” – group members log on to the web site for the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic Museum, a site that has a variety of source material: <http://cpr.org/museum/exhibits.html>. This will bring them to a 100 postcard series of the railroad that was completed in 1913. Students must choose three photos and complete a *Photo Analysis Worksheet* for each. Each student must choose one postcard to share with the entire class in our concluding activity.
 - * **Option B**
“Alfred A. Hart’s Stereographs” – group members log on to the web site for the Central Pacific Railroad Photographic Museum, the same site that the option A students are using: <http://cpr.org/museum/exhibits.html>. Under the “Exhibits” section the Hart collection will be found. These photos were taken between 1864 and 1869 to document the construction of the railroad. Each student must choose three photos and complete a *Photo Analysis Worksheet* for each. Each student must choose one photo to share with the entire class in our concluding activity.
4. **Historical Documents Analysis:**
Group members have five sources from which to choose. “*Harper’s weekly*” – group members will read four excerpts from articles “on conflicts with Native Americans, the terms of a peace treaty, the commercial benefits of the railroad for New York City, and the machine shops of Omaha” (PBS Transcontinental Railroad web site). They will also read selected parts of *The Pacific Railway Act* of July 1, 1862. Each member of the group must complete a *Written Document Analysis Worksheet* for one of the documents. No document can be analyzed twice, so the group must agree on who will analyze each document. They will share their analysis with the entire class in our concluding activity.
5. **Culminating Activity:**
This class will serve as a time for sharing the activities of the past four classes and evaluating their effectiveness. The first activity will be the hanging of our

Big Map of the Transcontinental Railroad. After that we will share the analysis of the photos and documents. A valuable part of this activity will be the input from students who have analyzed the same documents as those being shared. Important conclusions need to be made about the value of the use of primary source material from maps to photos.

Assessment:

- Students will be able to recognize the route followed by the transcontinental railroad
- Students will be able to identify the geographic difficulties encountered by the builders of the transcontinental railroad
- Students will be able to analyze photos and drawings connected to the transcontinental railroad.
- Students will be able to analyze and interpret excerpts from magazine articles discussing the impact of the transcontinental railroad.

Connection to our Text: *The American Nation* (Prentice Hall)

* Transcontinental Railroad pp. 549 – 551 (attached)

References:

Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum <<http://cpr.org/museum/Index>> .

Excellent web site with great teacher and student resources. For this lesson I used the post card set, stereograph photo exhibit, and two interactive maps as student resources for the “big map” activity.

Transcontinental Railroad: The American Experience <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/Tcrr/index.html>>

Excellent web site with a variety of useful resources. For this lesson I used the photo tour activity, the timeline used for the “big map” and the *Harper’s Weekly* excerpts from this site. This site also has an interesting interactive map activity, *The Race to Utah*, for the “big map” activity.

The Pacific Railway Act

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

Another excellent PBS resource with great background material. The piece that I used here was *The Pacific Railway Act*.

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration www.archives.gov

I used this source to acquire the *Written Document Analysis Worksheet* and the *Photo Analysis Worksheet*.

Materials:

- Overhead projector
- Classroom computers
- Transparency acetate
- Outline map of the western part of the United States
- A selection of colored makers (I use Crayola 12 color pack)
- Large butcher paper (I use a 48'' roll of art paper. This allows for bigger maps)
- Handout map: *The West: 1860 - 1890*
- Handout: *Timeline: Transcontinental Railroad*
- Handout: *Primary Sources: Reports from the End of the Track*
- Handout: *The Pacific Railway Act*
- Handout: *Written Document Analysis Worksheet*
- Handout: *Photo Analysis Worksheet*
- Handout: *Map Resources for Transcontinental Railroad Big Map*
- *Rand McNally Classroom Atlas* (any classroom atlas would do)
- Text: *The American Nation*, pp. 549-551