

Northwest History Consortium

THE CHINESE BUILD THE RAILROAD!

Ken Wortley
7th - 12th Grade

National Standard

Era 6: Grades 7-12 / Standard 2B

Standard 2B: Explain the rising racial conflict in different regions, including the anti-Chinese movement in the West and the rise of lynching in the South.

Washington State Social Studies EARLs

7th Grade

4: History - The student understands and applies knowledge of historical thinking, chronology, eras, turning points, major ideas, individuals, and themes in local, Washington State, tribal, United States, and world history in order to evaluate how history shapes the present and future.

4.1: Understands historical chronology

4.2: Understands and analyzes causal factors that have shaped major events in history

4.3: Understands that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events

4.4: Uses history to understand the present and plan for the future

NOTES

Students need to have a firm background in literacy-based learning, and they are expected to use the Socratic Method of group discussion.

The teacher will provide the class with three or four resources that they can read critically as a group. The classroom teacher will also begin this lesson with the reading of the picture book *Coolies* by Chris Soentpiet to assist with the building of background knowledge.

The students can also do the Quick-Write as a pre assessment; it gives the teacher the background levels of the students.

BACKGROUND

“The Great Event” was the joining of two railroad lines, making it possible to go from coast to coast by train. What would take days now took only an 11-12 hour trip to the west from the east.

Two companies built the railroad. The Central Pacific (starting in the west) and the Union Pacific (coming from the east). The government was giving subsidies for each mile of railway track that was laid, and each side wanted to lay more track than the other. Laying tracks on flat land was not too difficult, but most of the west involved working through mountains and valleys. Also, conditions for laying the tracks were dangerous and hard. They laid the tracks by putting heavy metal rails on top of wooden cross pieces called ‘ties,’ and the Union Pacific used 40 railroad cars to haul the 400 tons of rails, timber, fuel, and food for each mile of track.

The Central Pacific Railroad sent ships to China to recruit workers. Some 7000 Chinese workers came to California just to build the railroad, and they were paid a \$1.00 a day. These workers worked incredibly hard, long hours and were treated with contempt.

Northwest History Consortium

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The historic connection of the two lines made the country smaller, and the states became truly united. New immigrants could travel to the West for a new life, and people in the West could buy and trade goods from the East.

“In California in 1865, the Central Pacific experienced a severe labor shortage. By "labor shortage", what is meant is ‘a shortage of white laborers’, as the Central Pacific had hired only white men (mostly Irish) up to this point in time. It was not a shortage of men, as there were many men in California, but a shortage of men willing to work on the railroad, especially after silver had been discovered in Nevada that year. After all, there was free gold (in California) or silver (in Nevada) to be had, if only one looked hard enough. In fact, it was the 1849 gold rush that brought thousands of Chinese looking for this "free gold" over from China. By the early 1860's, newspapers estimated that 42,000 Chinese labored in northern California [Howard 225].”

In 1865, Charles Crocker, amid much dispute, began hiring Chinese workers to fill in for the white labor shortage. This was a decision that profoundly changed the course of race relations in the West. Around the same time the Union Pacific Railroad was also experiencing racial issues.

As the railroad pushed across the prairie lands moving west, they began to constantly run up against Native American raiding parties. Some of the land across which the railroad was being built had been bought by the government from white owners, but much more of it was simply taken from land previously promised to the Native Americans.

Howard, Robert West. *The Great Iron Trail -- The Story of the First Transcontinental Railroad*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1962 from “The Workers of the Central Pacific.” [Bushong.net](http://www.bushong.net). ©2002 – 2010 David Bushong and Dawn Emord Bushong. Hayward, CA. 10 June 2010 <<http://www.bushong.net/dawn/about/college/ids100/workers.shtml>>.

SCENARIO

On May 10, 1869 the rails met at Promontory Point, Utah. The news of the event was telegraphed immediately to the rest of the nation. The whole nation celebrated the linking of the East and West Coast, and the United States was never the same again. It was now a united nation linked by steel rails, and there was so much to celebrate when the two lines were connected. The golden spikes were quietly replaced by Chinese workers, and this allowed incredible travel to be complete.

A Chinese imperial ambassador was dispatched to the scene upon countless complaints from Chinese families who have complained about their loved ones’ treatment and the general working conditions.

Northwest History Consortium

THE CHINESE BUILD THE RAILROAD!

TASKS

You are on a special commission to investigate the building of the railroad and the working conditions of the workers who came from China. A full report will be given to the president of the United States and the emperor of China.

- Work in groups to investigate the working conditions of workers in general on this important project.
- Compare the working conditions of the Chinese.
- Discuss and present the findings in a Socratic Circle Method.

RESOURCES

“The Building of the Transcontinental Railroad.” HistoryCentral.com. ©2009 – 2010 MultiEducator, Inc. New Rochelle, NY. 10 June 2010 <<http://www.historycentral.com/railroad/trans.html>>.

CPRR.Org. “Chinese-American Contribution to Transcontinental Railroad.” 30 April 2010. Central Pacific Railroad Organization (Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum – CPRR.Org). ©1999 – 2010. [location unknown]. 10 June 2010 <<http://cpr.org/Museum/Chinese.html>>.

Howard, Robert West. *The Great Iron Trail -- The Story of the First Transcontinental Railroad*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1962 from “The Workers of the Central Pacific.” Bushong.net. ©2002 – 2010 David Bushong and Dawn Emord Bushong. Hayward, CA. 10 June 2010 <<http://www.bushong.net/dawn/about/college/ids100/workers.shtml>>.

Jepsen, David. “Rail Conflict and Opportunity.” Washington State Historical Society. ©2007 – 2010. Tacoma, WA. 10 June 2010 <<http://stories.washingtonhistory.org/Railroads/People/RailConflict/Default.aspx>>.

Jepsen, David. “The West the Railroads Made.” Washington State Historical Society. ©2007 – 2010. Tacoma, WA. 10 June 2010 <<http://stories.washingtonhistory.org/railroads/>>.

Jepsen, David. “A World Made Smaller.” Washington State Historical Society. ©2007 – 2010. Tacoma, WA. 10 June 2010 <<http://stories.washingtonhistory.org/Railroads/Intro/WorldMadeSmaller.aspx>>.

Soentpiet, Chris. Coolies. New York, NY: Puffin (Penguin Group), 2003.

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THE CHINESE BUILD THE RAILROAD!

“Transcontinental Railroad.” The National Archives. 2010. College Park, MD. 10 June 2010 <<http://search.archives.gov/query.html?qt=transcontinental+railroad&submit=GO&col=1arch&col=naration&rq=0&qs=&qc=1arch&qc=naration&pw=100%25&ws=0&la=&qm=0&st=1&nh=10&lk=1&rf=0&oq=&rq=0&qp=>>>.

Washington State history textbook, chapters, and pages pertaining to this unit.

ASSESSMENT

Use a Quick-Write to begin the lesson. Ask, “What do you already know about:

- Chinese Immigrants”?
- The building of the Transcontinental Railroad”?

Gather information on what the student’s prior knowledge is before beginning this unit.

When the Socratic discussion is going on, the students are responsible to:

- Participate.
- Students are to record their observations of the inner group discussing and finally an evaluation of the Socratic seminar.

When the unit on Chinese Immigration is complete ask the students to respond to their original Quick-Write and complete it with what they have learned, plus a more deeper thinking question that applies to the present-day situation.

Grading: use the rubric at this URL from the Washington State CBA assessments:

OSPI. “Dig Deep – Analyzing Sources CBA. 2010. Olympia, WA. 10 June 2010 <<http://www.k12.wa.us/SocialStudies/CBAs/MiddleSchool/MiddleSchHistory-DigDeepCBA.pdf>>.

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REFERENCES/CITATIONS

“History Standards for Grades 5-12 United States.” UCLA National Center for History in the Schools. 2005. Los Angeles, CA. 10 June 2010 <<http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/era6-5-12.html>>.

Howard, Robert West. *The Great Iron Trail -- The Story of the First Transcontinental Railroad*. New York, NY: Bonanza Books, 1962 from “The Workers of the Central Pacific.” Bushong.net. ©2002 – 2010 David Bushong and Dawn Emord Bushong. Hayward, CA. 10 June 2010 <<http://www.bushong.net/dawn/about/college/ids100/workers.shtml>>.

OSPI. “Social Studies Essential Learning Requirements: Recommended Grade-by-Grade Sequence for Grade Level Expectations – K-12.” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. 2009. Olympia, WA. 10 June 2010 <http://standards.ospi.k12.wa.us/EalrsPubDocs/GradeSpecificDocument/Social%20Studies/GLES-Social_Studies-Grade7.doc>.

Northwest History Consortium

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