

The Wedding of the Rails

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Overview

Students will learn about the Transcontinental Railroad—its importance in settling the west, as well as its impact on immigration and Native Americans.

Connection to the Curriculum

Social studies, ELA, and technology

South Carolina Social Studies Academic Standards

3-1.2 Interpret thematic maps of South Carolina places and regions that show how and where people live, work, and use land and transportation.

5-2.3 Summarize how railroads affected development of the West, including their ease and inexpensiveness for travelers and their impact on trade and the natural environment.

Social Studies Literacy Elements

F. Ask geographic questions: where is it located? Why is it there? What is significant about its location? How is its location related to that of other people, places, and environments.

H. Use maps to observe and interpret geographic information and relationships.

L. Interpret calendars, time lines, maps, charts, tables, graphs, flow charts, diagrams, photographs, paintings, cartoons, architectural drawings, documents, letters, censuses, and other artifacts.

Grade Range

This activity is most suitable for grade 5, but includes some literacy elements for grade 3.

Time

50 minutes, not counting the extension lesson, which is begun on the same day. This lesson is one of the last from a 10-day unit on the American Industrial Revolution.

Materials Needed

Transparency map of S. C. railroads (1860) from *S. C.: An Atlas*

Transparency map of S. C. railroads (1925) from *S. C.: An Atlas*

U. S. atlases or textbooks on the U. S.

Transparency map of U. S. transcontinental railroad

Blank maps of U. S. with state lines for students

Questions from the United Streaming video clip

Colored pencils

Objectives

Students will be able (1) to plot the path of the Transcontinental Railroad, labeling key cities and railroad lines; and (2) explain its effect on populations of Native Americans, immigrants, and white settlers moving west.

Suggested Procedures

- Introduce the lesson with the song, “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad,” playing from <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/lyrics/railroad.htm>. The words to the music are displayed. Encourage the students to sing along.
- Explain to the class that they’re going to learn about the Transcontinental Railroad, providing the meaning for “trans” (across)—in this case, a railroad that goes across the North American continent in America.
- Ask, **“Is it possible to have more than one transcontinental railroad?”** (Yes, a railroad that goes across *any* continent would be a transcontinental railroad.)
- Display the transparency of the map of S. C. railroads in 1860, a time shortly before the completion of America’s Transcontinental Railroad. (Point this out.)
- Then, show the transparency of the map of S. C. railroads in 1925 to show the students how the rails spread out from the original tracks.
- Ask, **“What effect do you think the growth of the railroads had in S. C. ?”** (Cities popped up along the rail routes.)
- Ask, **“Do you think that the railroads in the eastern United States grew the same way—extensions from the old rail lines?”** (They may assume that these railroads just gradually extended toward the west, but that is not the case.)
- Show the transparency of the Transcontinental Railroad, pointing out that before 1865, settlement of non-Native Americans stopped at the Mississippi River, except for in California.
- Ask, **“What event originally caused people to travel all the way to California to settle there, rather than settle along the way?”** (California Gold Rush of 1849)
- Remind them that a trek from Chicago, Illinois, to Sacramento, California, (or to Oregon), before the Transcontinental Railroad, took six months!
- Ask, **“Why do you think railroads were the most important business in 1860?”** (They could transport raw materials—like iron-ore to steel-making plants or timber to furniture and paper-making manufactures—as well as food and other “finished” products (products ready to sell to the public) so much more quickly. The faster industries could get products from one place to another, the faster they could make money.)
- Explain that the Transcontinental Railroad was actually two railroads that “met in the middle,” so that there would be railroad connections from the east coast to the west coast of the U. S. Ask, **“How is this action like a wedding?”** (The two rails joined to “become one” railway.)
- Pass out a handout of questions to each student. Tell students they are to answer the questions from a United Streaming clip on railroads: <http://www.unitedstreaming.co/>, “American Industrial Revolution,” “Railroads.” (Ask your media specialist for a login and password. Although this clip is less than 3 minutes long, it can take much longer than that to download to play; therefore, it is suggested that this clip be downloaded and saved on your desktop prior to the lesson.)
- Play the clip—more than once—if necessary.
- Have students work in pairs or groups to compare answers on the first six questions and to complete the “Thinking Questions.”

- Review and/discuss the questions. (See key.)
- Describe how the workers from each railroad competed to see which group would get to Promontory first and that there was a special ceremony with a golden spike hammered in to attach the two rails.
- Display the transparency of the map of the Transcontinental Railroad again.
- Hand out outline maps of the United States to the students.
- Remind them that in 1854, there were no railroads west of the Mississippi River. Show them this river on the transparency and ask them to draw it in blue on their maps and label it. (They may prefer to use their text books or an atlas as a reference.)
- Tell them that nine new states across the “heartland of America” became a part of the Union after the completion of this railroad in 1869, but by 1900. Then ask, “What do you think those states were?” (Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, and Utah.) List these on the board.
- Ask them to use an atlas or their textbooks to locate and label these states and to color them yellow. Ask them to color California orange since it was already a state at the time this railroad was completed.
- Then, use the transparency to indicate the locations of Sacramento, California; Omaha, Nebraska; and Promontory, Utah. Ask them to put a dot for each and label them.
- Next, indicate the pre-existing Union Pacific line(s) in the East and ask them to draw it in pencil (railroad tracks as a symbol?). Show them the “new” Union Pacific rail and the Central Pacific line that joins it, and ask that they draw both. Ask them to label both “new” Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads and go over their “tracks,” each railroad company line in a different color.
- Remind them to make sure their map has a title, author, key/legend, and compass rose and that the key matches the map. Observe each group closely, making suggestions for corrections and/or additions until each map is accurate. Those that finish early should guide other students in completing their maps.
- As a summary and in preparation for the extension project, read aloud pages 4-13, “From Sea to Shining Sea,” from *Oil, Steel, and Railroads*.
- Tell the students that each pair or group is going to use the internet the following day to research a related topic. (See “Extension Activity.”)

Lesson Extensions

1. Have students search the internet for related topics and make a brochure or poster based upon their research to be presented and displayed after completion. The following are suggestions: train songs, “Harvey Houses,” railroad gauge, Irish or Chinese immigrants in the late 1860’s, Pullman cars, dining cars. Be flexible in considering other related topics.
2. Students could use an atlas to make a physical map of the West to discuss why the Transcontinental Railroad was located where it was.

Suggested Evaluation

This lesson will be assessed by observation with questions from their notes/study guide included in a unit test on the Industrial Revolution. With teacher guidance, students will devise a rubric for the pamphlets/brochure extension.

Materials Provided

United States map with state boundaries (for students)
U. S. map of Transcontinental Railroad (for transparency)
Questions from the United Streaming video clip

Resources

South Carolina: An Atlas, Charles F. Kovacik and Theodore R. Steinke, ed., South Carolina Geographic Alliance, 2005. (ISBN: 0-9768247-0-1). 1-888-895-2023 or www.cas.sc.edu/cege

<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/kids/lyrics/railroad.htm> (Words and music to *I've Been Working on the Railroad*)

<http://www.unitedstreaming.com/> "American Industrial Revolution," "Railroads" video clip. (Get login and password from your media specialist.)

Oil, Steel, and Railroads: America's Big Businesses in the Later 1800s, Jesse Janow, The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 2004. (ISBN: 0-8239-4276-7)

USA Studies Weekly, Series B, Vol. 4, Issue 1, First Quarter, Week 5 ("Industrial Revolution")

THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD

"The Wedding of the Rails"

Answer the following questions from the video clip:

1. Plans for the Transcontinental Railroad were "derailed" (put on hold) because of the _____ War.
2. The Union Pacific began building the railroad from Omaha, _____.
3. The Central Pacific started at Sacramento, _____.
4. They two railroads met in Promontory, _____.

Because so many men were killed in the Civil War, the two rail companies hired immigrants to help in the building.

5. In the West, the Central Pacific Company used many _____ immigrants.
6. In the east (really central United States), the Union Pacific used Civil War soldiers, African-Americans, and many _____, immigrants.

THINKING QUESTIONS:

1. What were some of the positive outcomes from the Transcontinental Railroad?
2. What were some of the negative outcomes from the Transcontinental Railroad.
3. How do you think the Transcontinental Railroad affected populations out West? Include (1) white settlers, (2) Chinese and Irish immigrants, and (3) Native Americans.

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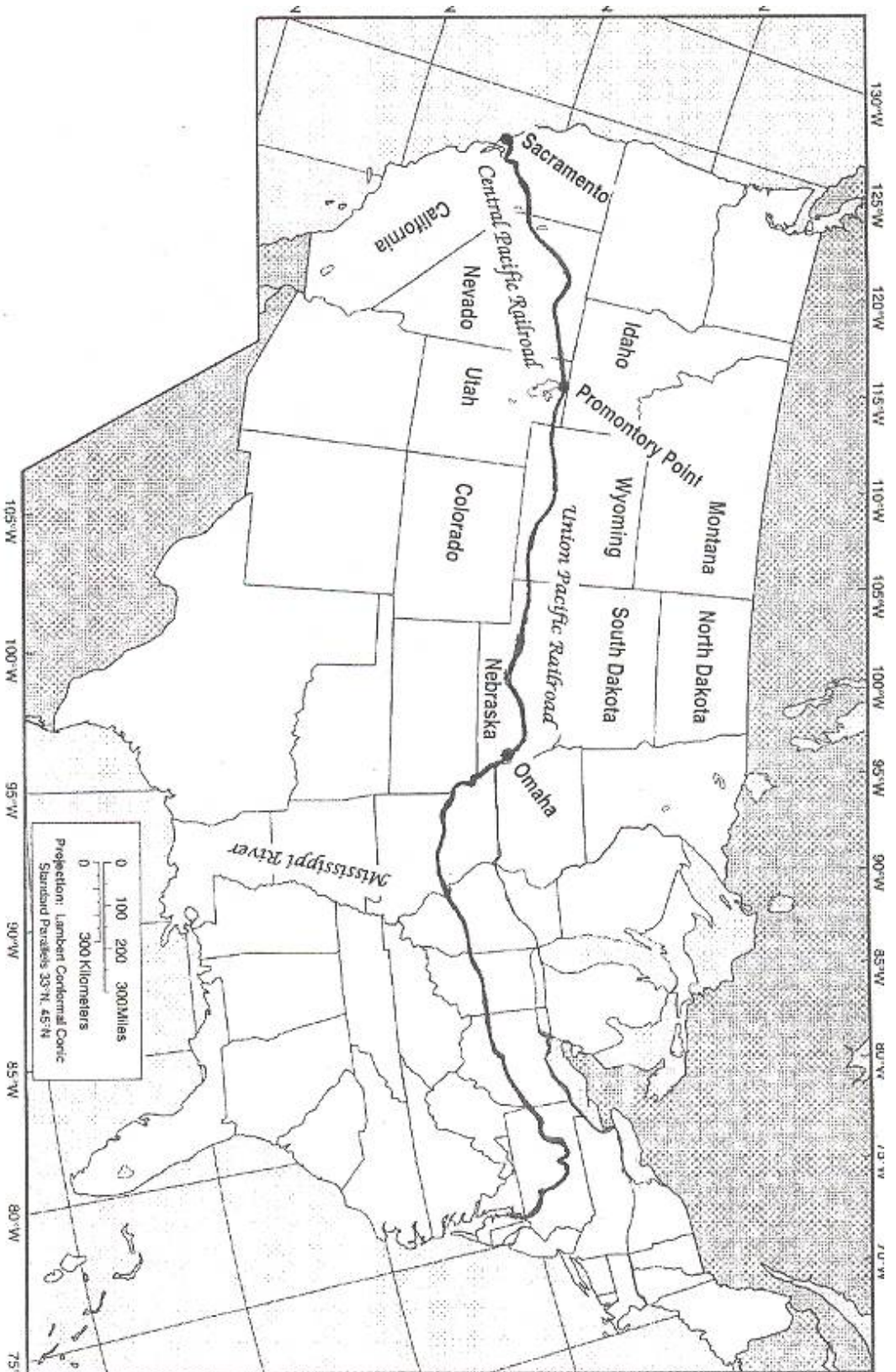
THINKING QUESTIONS:

1. What were some of the positive outcomes from the Transcontinental Railroad? Possible answers: Its construction provided many jobs for Chinese and Irish immigrants, in particular; it took much less time for people—and products—to travel from East to West and vice versa; people who intended to go West to look for gold wound up creating settlements along the way—this could also be a negative effect; the switch from wood to coal became important for the steam engines, which boosted the coal mining industry; the change from iron to steel rails promoted the steel industry; the gauges of the tracks had to be the same, so that the same train could go the whole distance.
2. What were some of the negative outcomes from the Transcontinental Railroad? The trains divided buffalo herds, upon which the Indians depended for survival. (The trains scared away the buffalo, which were often shot at if they got on or near the tracks.) Also, the railroad companies didn't pay the workers very well. The environment was harmed by the smoke from the engines.
3. How do you think the Transcontinental Railroad affected populations out West? (Include **white settlers, Chinese and Irish immigrants, and Native Americans.**) More and more white settlers that were headed for California by rail wound up settling along the way. Many Chinese workers wound up staying in America, particularly in the West. The Irish were also lured to America because of the jobs provided by the building of the railroad and remained there. The Native Americans wound up being displaced because of their dependence upon the buffalo. They followed the buffalo herds, which were divided because of the railroad. The railroad chased away or killed the buffalo.



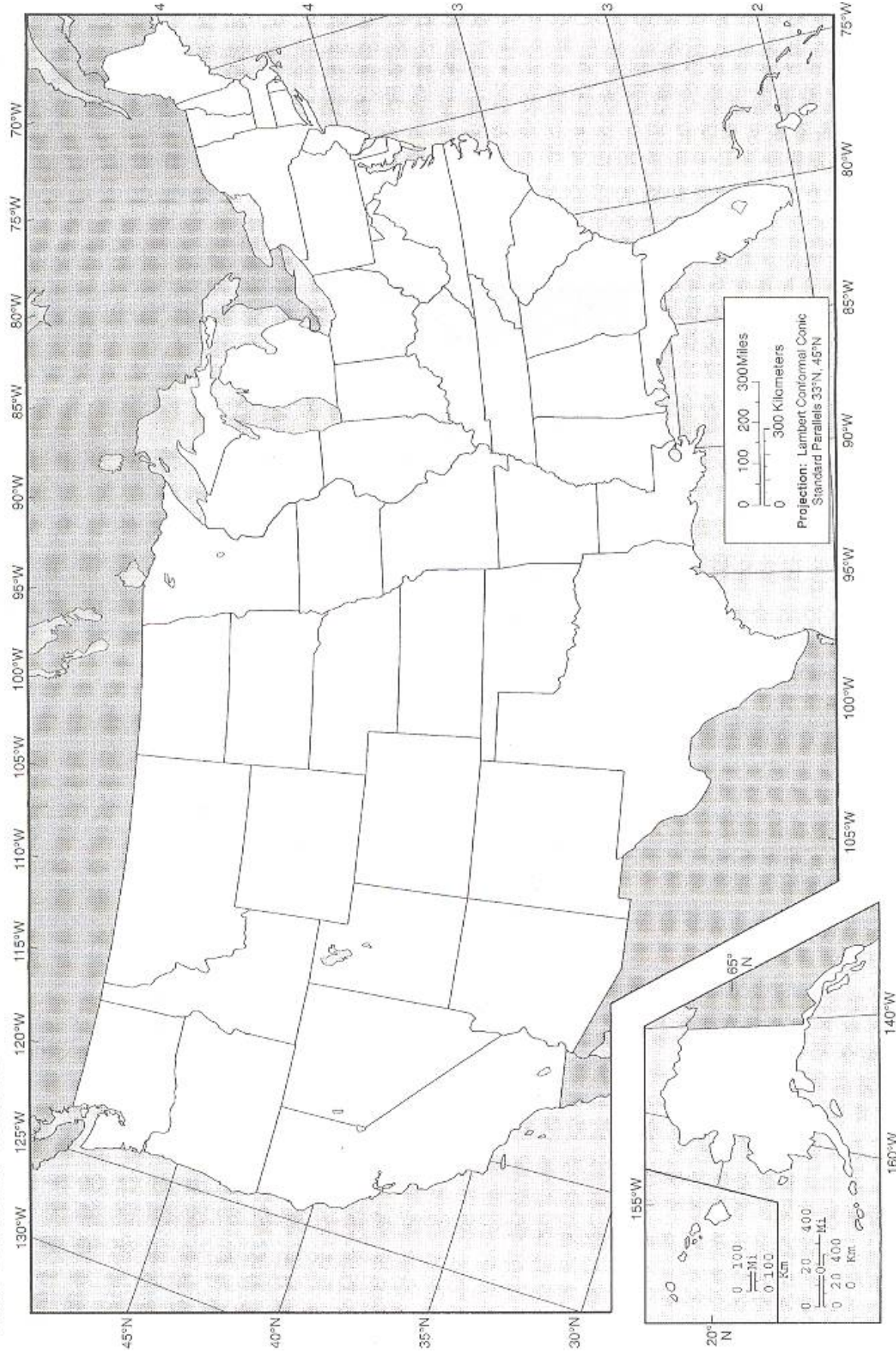
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TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD



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