

## **Songs that tell the Story of the Railroads**

### **The Basics**

#### **Time Required**

1-2 class periods

#### **Subject Areas**

8<sup>th</sup> Grade US History

Development of the Industrial U.S., 1870-1900

#### **Common Core Standards Addressed:**

Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

#### **Author**

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### **The Lesson**

#### **Introduction**

This lesson plan will each focus on aspects of the relationship between music and the railroads. It will also explore the question of whether we are better off using technology or letting everything being done without the use of machines.

It is amazing how Americans from their earliest childhood days till their deaths tend to think fondly of the railroads. Even though trains are still an important means of transporting products from one end of our great nation to another it is not the primary transportation for people anymore. We tend to use the automobile and planes to cross our great land but what is heroic about those modes of transportation? No, the train has been indelibly immortalized in the songs of our nation forever more. We hear the rhythm of the train's wheels hitting the tracks or ask the conductor to blow his whistle as we see trains pass. From the time we are little kids in school till we pass on we sing and hum the tunes that helped make our country great!

#### **Guiding Questions**

Pre-Write: Students will listen to the sound of a train whistle and chugging along the track and then write about their feelings.

#### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to outline the physical obstacles to and the economic and political factors involved in building a network of roads, canals, and railroads (e.g., Henry Clay's American System).

#### **Preparation Instructions**

Sound recording of train – engine, whistle, etc.  
“Drill, Ye Tarries, Drill”

#### **Lesson Activities**

Question #1: What do you feel when you hear the sound of a train whistle or the cars moving across the tracks?

The building of the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific railroad took great vision and lots of money. The Central Pacific had the Charles Crocker, Collis Huntington, Leland Stanford, Theodore Judah and Mark Hopkins while the Union Pacific had a board of Directors both of whom lobbied Congress for more and more money. Luckily both had Abe Lincoln on their side. Throughout the years the railroad was built on loans and borrowing. The government never made the fortune they had hoped to make. In the long run the country of course benefited greatly from the race to Promontory Utah and the tying of the two railroads into one. The Central Pacific Railroad one the race but the country won the war.

*Vocabulary:*

capitalist: (person who has money invested in a business), depression (a period of low economic output and a relatively high unemployment), holding company ( a company who has controlling interest in stock of another company), monopoly (An economic condition whereby a single seller or producer has exclusive ownership or control over the distribution and sales of his or her product.), regulated (To be under the control of law or a legal authority.), transcontinental (Extending or going across a continent, as a railway system.)

Question #2: Look at the following image on the construction of the railroads and discuss them with the rest of the class. <http://memory.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3g10000/3g11000/3g11300/3g11390v.jpg>

Question #3: Divide the class into geographic locations and have them research the areas that the railroads would have to be constructed. What specific problems might be encountered during construction? How is math involved in constructing a railroad? What roadblocks might be put in the way of a huge construction project like this today in America? (Environmental protection) Today we could have oil but an Alaskan pipeline is prevented because of environmental protection issues.

Sing “Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill” and discuss the relationship between the boss and the crew of the railroads.

Question #4: Define the vocabulary of the song

*Vocabulary:*

*tarriers* – (railway workers who blasted the rock to clear the way for the rail bed.)

*tay* – (tea)

*premature* – (occurring before the appropriate time)

*docked* – (payment withheld)

Question # 5: According to Stephen Ambrose, in his book *Nothing Like it in the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), “1600 Chinese were employed to work on the Central Pacific Railroad and without them it would have been impossible to build the railroad.” Why?

### **Assessment**

Activity #1: Draw a storyboard explaining what happens in the song. Then explain what your drawings mean. It would also help to explain how the Chinese were treated while working on the railroads. (The explanation should take into account how the foreman treated the workers, especially the Irish.)

Activity #2: What jobs do many immigrants do when they first come to America? How does America treat its immigrants?

## **Extending the Lesson**

Broader Context: What does an employer expect of his/her employees when they go to work each day? What kind of expectations does the employee have of the management?

Extended Activity: Write an interview of a laborer working on either the Central Pacific Railroad or the Union Pacific Railroad. What are your aspirations for yourself or your family?

## **Resources**

### **Lyrics**

“Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill”

Every morning at seven o'clock  
There are twenty tarriers drilling at the rock,  
And the boss come along and he said "Keep still,  
And come down heavy on the cast-iron drill"

And drill, ye tarriers, drill  
For its work all day for the sugar in yer tay  
Down behind the old railway,  
And drill, ye tarriers, drill  
And blast and fire!

Our new foreman is Jimmy McCann,  
By God he is a blame mean man.  
One day a premature blast went off  
And a mile in the air went big Jim Gough.

When next pay day came around  
Jim Gough a dollar short was found.  
When he asked what for came this reply  
"You were docked for the time you were up in the sky."

Our boss is a good man down to the ground  
And he married a lady six feet round.  
She bakes good bread and she bakes it well  
But she bakes it hard as the holes in Hell.