

Classroom Activities for:

The Kids Book of Canada's Railway and How the CPR was Built

by Deborah Hodge

Language Arts

- Pretend you are a surveyor, railway navvy, or a homesteader on the Canadian prairies and keep a journal for a week.
- Write opinion pieces, or stage a debate or dramatic performance, with students taking differing points of view, on the building of the railway across the Canada. Choose a variety of roles or positions including the: surveyors, navvies, Metis, Aboriginal people, CPR and Canadian government.
- Imagine you are a Chinese navvy building the railway in British Columbia in the late 1800s. Write a letter to your family in China describing your life and work.
- Make a postcard with an illustration on one side and a message on the other describing your journey on the first transcontinental train across Canada on July 4, 1886.
- Compile a list of old railway terms, slang and definitions.

Geography

- On a wall map of Canada, trace the route of the CPR — Montreal to Vancouver. Point out the location of major cities in Canada (many of which developed as a result of the CPR).
- Note the geography of various areas (Canadian Shield, Rocky Mountains, prairies etc.) and how they affected the construction of the CPR track.

History

- Make a chart comparing “Canada Before the Railway” and “Canada Today”. Include information on: population, areas of settlement, wages, transportation, immigration, communication and so on.
- In a written or oral report, compare living and working conditions and wages for different groups of railway workers: Chinese navvies, European labourers, and English speaking workers.

- Many of British Columbia's first Chinese citizens came to Canada to help build the railway. What happened to these workers after the railway was built? Research the history of Chinese citizens in British Columbia over the last 100 years. What challenges did they face? What contributions did they make to British Columbia? Present your findings to the class.
- Take a field trip to a train museum or ride on an old steam train.

Science

- Research the history and development of the steam engine and present your findings in a written or oral report.
- Use an atlas to determine average temperatures and precipitation for various seasons across Canada. Consider how the weather affected the working conditions of surveyors and navvies.

Fine Arts

- Paint or draw a scene from the early days of Canada's railway.
- Design a poster advertising the early CPR trains. (See page 31 for examples.)
- Build a model trestle or railway bridge with popsicle sticks or toothpicks.
- Sing or listen to old railway songs such as "I've Been Working on the Railroad".