

The Impact of Railroads on New York State in the 1800s

A Learning Experience Using Document-Based Questions

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The Impact of Railroads on New York State in the 1800s

LEARNING CONTEXT

This document-based activity is designed for use in a fourth grade (heterogeneous) classroom. It was developed with regard to the New York State Social Studies Core Curriculum, which connects local, New York State, and United States history.

New York State is currently developing an elementary assessment consisting of multiple choice questions, constructed-response questions, and a document-based question. This assessment will be administered to all New York State public school students in fifth grade in November 2001, although the assessment itself is based on the third grade (40%) and fourth grade (60%) curricula.

The following activity is an example of a document-based question that may be used on its own as an assessment or in direct instruction through the accompanying Learning Experience.

This activity is a component of the Industrial Growth and Expansion content understanding of the New York State fourth grade scope and sequence. Specifically, it is an important part of the 1800s transportation changes and growth, dovetailing well with the Erie Canal and Immigration.

GOALS

1. The students will recall the importance of the Erie Canal to New York State's cities, people, and economy. Furthering this knowledge they will understand that beginning in the mid-1800s railroads began to overtake the Erie Canal in importance; were vital to the Civil War; and by the 1870s connected all major cities in the state and promoted the growth of other cities and towns.

Students will also know and understand the following:

- Railroads provided faster and cheaper ways to transport goods.
 - Railroads helped the economy by providing jobs.
 - Passenger trains allowed people to travel for pleasure to new destinations and sites.
2. Students will read and analyze primary documents and will write a response to a scaffolding question(s) following each document.
 3. Students will complete a graphic organizer synthesizing the information presented in the documents.
 4. Students will write an essay based on the documents, citing information from four of the seven documents, in accordance with New York State's testing format.
 5. Students will write introductory and concluding paragraphs in the essay, in accordance with New York State's testing format.

New York State Social Studies and Performance Indicators

Standard 1 - History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

Key Idea 3: Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

Performance Indicator: Classify information by type of activity: social, political, economic, technological, scientific, cultural, or religious.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this activity, the students will successfully complete a document-based question.

Procedure

This learning experience should follow the study of the Erie Canal and presupposes the children have garnered the understanding of the importance of the canal to New York State. The development and growth of railroads then supplants the Erie Canal in many ways.

LESSON 1

Provide background for the beginning of the railroad's growth:

In 1831, the DeWitt Clinton, a small locomotive with three cars, traveled from Albany to Schenectady. This began the era of the railroad. Railroad lines began to spring up across New York. A faster and cheaper way to move goods and people was established.

By the time of the Civil War, New York had more than 2,600 miles of track. During the Civil War, railroads were extensively used for moving troops and supplies throughout the year. This was another advantage over canals, which could not be used in winter. Trains also reached areas without waterways.

Following the Civil War, industries prospered and grew in New York, as did the railroads. In the 1860s Cornelius Vanderbilt purchased two railroads connecting New York City and Albany. He then bought another railroad, which linked Albany and Buffalo. These were networked and became the New York Central Railroad. By 1870 all major cities in the state were connected. Grand Central Terminal was built in 1871, becoming the largest railroad terminal in the world! (Railroads opened the West, furthering the success of the Erie Canal. Eventually, the transcontinental railroad was built virtually linking the east and west coasts of the U.S.)

Many cities and towns near the railroad lines grew and prospered. This document-based activity spotlights Otsego County, specifically the towns of Oneonta and Cooperstown. Oneonta greatly benefited from the growth and expansion of railroads.

By 1900, over 8,100 miles of track existed. Because of its extensive railroad system New York became an established business center.

Although new forms of transportation have developed since the 1800s, the railroads still remain an important and viable means of transportation for both goods and people today.

Students should have some prior experience working with primary and secondary sources, although this learning experience will lead and guide them throughout the overall development of a document-based question. The document-based question on the New York Social Studies test at fifth grade will be constructed so that students will be able to directly obtain the necessary information from each presented document. Although the questions appear relatively easy, it is the assimilation and synthesizing of the information the students must accomplish.

LESSON 2

Time: approximately 40 minutes

Following the presentation of historical information in lesson 1, the students should be well “trained,” pardon the pun, and ready to begin.

Note. For the purpose of instruction, the documents should be distributed without the scaffolding question. This may then be used as an assessment in lesson 5.

Students should be given documents 1a and 1b. These documents feature a picture of Oneonta and the Delaware and Hudson Railroad and U.S. Census Data for the town of Oneonta.

The students should study the picture of Oneonta and read the information under and alongside the picture. Students should write down their observations.

Document 1b should then be studied. Students should be able to draw an overall conclusion regarding the population of Oneonta from 1820 to 1900. This should be included in their notes. The students should be guided by the teacher to note the year 1860, which is prior to the establishment of the railroad in Oneonta, compared to 1870 (a rather small growth), then compared to 1880 (the population more than doubled from 1860) and finally compared to 1900 (population more than quadrupled). This is a wonderful opportunity to utilize math skills in Social Studies.

A class discussion should follow involving the students’ observations from document 1a, as well as 1b. The students should deduce that the town of Oneonta grew significantly after the arrival of the railroads.

LESSON 3

Time: approximately 50 minutes

This lesson involves the use of documents 2-5. Once again, copies of the documents without the scaffolding questions should be distributed. The scaffolding questions are quite straightforward in the information being sought. As the students read, interpret, and synthesize these documents, they should begin to anticipate the actual scaffolding questions that will be used in lesson 5 (with guidance from the teacher as the lesson progresses).

Given documents 2a and 2b, the students should read the information presented in both. The teacher may point out the quote to the left of document 2b, since coal is not easily discernible from the picture itself. Students need to recognize the importance of text as well as pictures relating to the documents. Students should deduce that these documents relate to the shipping of goods or products on railroads. They should identify a number of goods in their notes.

Document 3 again involves both picture and text. The teacher may guide the reading of the text and lead a discussion centered on the concept of “big markets.” A compare/contrast Venn diagram may also be developed for the railroad vs. “rough, crude wagon roads.”

Text is vital to documents 4 and 5. The featured postcard in document 4 shows a train and men; however, the back of the postcard identifies these men and their jobs.

Finally, document 5 integrates the immigration unit. The influx of immigrants in the late 1800s is an important component of New York State’s history and growth. The immigrants faced many problems, one

of which was finding jobs. Document 5's text clearly states that not only did many immigrants find work with the railroads, but also they encouraged others to immigrate to America.

To conclude this lesson, the students should organize documents 2-5 in two categories: goods and jobs.

LESSON 4

Time: approximately 50 minutes

The final two documents (without the scaffolding questions) should be given to the students.

Document 6 features a newspaper story describing the arrival of the Ringling Brothers' Circus. Just as county/local/state fairs are big attractions in the summer today, have the children imagine the arrival of a circus to a small town like Cooperstown in the late 1800s! The children should transport themselves back to this time period of no television, radio, etc. to fully realize the spectacle the circus brought with its clowns, animals, and other acts. The students should recognize the value of this entertainment to not only children, but also adults.

The ability to travel to more distant places is an important idea in document 7. The children may compare how far they might travel by horse or horse and wagon to the distances covered by trains. The factors making this possible should be noted.

The students should also be instructed that document 7 is a broadside, an important form of communication of this time period, given that there was no TV or radio.

Both documents 6 and 7 represent another category (fun, pleasure, or entertainment) for the students to note as they continue to think about the importance of railroads to people and places in the 1800s.

The graphic organizer may be completed as a culminating activity followed by a concluding discussion, or it may be used in lesson 5 as part of the document-based question.

LESSON 5

Time: 1 hour 30 minutes (the amount of time to be allotted by New York State)

Complete the "Railroads in the 1800s" Document-Based Question.

Resources

A list of primary source documents that were used in this activity

DOCUMENT 1A

“84-View from Milling Co’s. Tower, Oneonta, N.Y.” Postcard File - Oneonta - Railroads. Special Collections, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY.

DOCUMENT 1B

Shupe, Barbara, Janet Steins and Jyoti Pandit, New York State Population. *A Compilation of Federal Census Data 1790 - 1980* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1987).

DOCUMENT 2A

Mohowski, Robert E., *The New York, Ontario and Western Railway and the Dairy Industry in Central New York State: Milk Cans, Mixed Trains and Motor Cars* (Pennsylvania: Garrigues House, 1995), p. 3.

DOCUMENT 2B

“#126-D. & H. Yards, east of Richard’s Crossing, Oneonta, N.Y.” Postcard File - Oneonta Railroads. Special Collections, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY.

DOCUMENT 3A

“#134-D. & H. Depot, Oneonta, N.Y.” Postcard File - Oneonta - Railroads. Special Collections, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY.

DOCUMENT 3B

Catella, James, *Our Home Town Railroad* (Laurens, NY: Village Printer, 1982), p. 4.

DOCUMENT 4

“V-R. R. - 3 - Engine & Work Train - G. & C. U. R. R.” Ward File - Railroads. Special Collections, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown, NY.

DOCUMENT 5

Mohowski, Robert E., *Milk Cans, Mixed Trains and Motor Cars: The New York, Ontario & Western Railway and the Dairy Industry In Central New York State* (Pennsylvania: Garrigues House, 1995), p. 179.

DOCUMENT 6

Grills, Russell A., *Cooperstown and Its Railroad: A History of the Cooperstown Railroad Company and Its Effect on the Community of Cooperstown 1865-1903* (MA Thesis, SUNY Oneonta, 1969), pp. 109-110.

DOCUMENT 7

“Excursion, Katterskill, Saturday, Sept 30, ‘11.” Broadside File - Railroads. Special Collections, New York State Historical Association, Cooperstown NY.

Document-Based Question

The Impact of Railroads on New York State in the 1800s

This question is based on the accompanying documents (1 - 7). Some of the documents have been edited for the purpose of this question. The question is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the context (information) of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document.

DIRECTIONS

This document-based question consists of three parts.

- In part A, you will analyze each of the seven documents and answer a question(s) based on your interpretation.
- In part B, you will be asked to complete a graphic organizer using the information you wrote in part A.
- In part C, you will write an essay based on parts A and B.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The 19th century featured the development and growth of many forms of transportation. For example, railroads brought about important changes for New York's towns, cities, people and economy throughout most of the 1800s. The railroads played a major part in the development of our state and country.

TASK

In a well-organized essay using information from the documents, identify and describe three ways that towns and people in New York State benefited from (were helped by) the growth of the railroads.

Keep in mind the following as you write the essay:

- Write an introductory paragraph.
- Develop your essay using information you analyzed from the questions under each document.
- Do not simply repeat the contents of the document(s).
- Cite at least four documents in your essay.
- Write a concluding paragraph.

Essential Question: Identify and describe three ways that towns and people in New York State benefited from (were helped by) the growth of the railroads.

Part A: Short Answer

DIRECTIONS

Analyze the documents and answer the questions that follow each document in the space provided. Your answers to questions will help you write the essay.

QUESTIONS

1. The town of Oneonta grew significantly after the railroad came. Using the census data from **Document 1** and your math skills, write down how much greater the population in the year 1900 was compared to the year 1860.

2. Using **Document 2**, list three goods shipped on the railroads.

3. After reading the quote in **Document 3**, explain “the idea” that thrilled the people.

4. Using the photograph in **Document 4**, name three jobs provided by the railroad companies.

5. Using the photograph and quote in **Document 5**, how did the railroads help some immigrants?

6. After studying the photograph and quote from **Document 6**, what means of transportation brought the Ringling Brothers' Circus to the town of Cooperstown?

7. According to **Document 6**, why was the arrival of the Ringling Brothers' Circus such a big event?

8. After reading the information on the poster or broadside shown in **Document 7**, explain how people used trains for pleasure or fun.

9. Using the last paragraph in the broadside shown in **Document 7**, name two points of interest people are able to see on this trip.

Part B

**The Impact of Railroads on NYS in the 1800s
GRAPHIC ORGANIZER**

Directions: Use the following graphic organizer to help you sort and categorize the information from the 7 documents you just analyzed. Try to group the ideas from the documents with specific headings.

Economy - Jobs

Economy - Growth of
Cities and Towns

The Effect of Railroads on NYS in the 1800s

Economy - Transportation of Goods

Pleasure - Enjoyment by People

Part C

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