

The First Transcontinental Railroad

This lesson, presented at the Western History Association's 2008 Conference, is a simulation that teaches students about the significance of the First Transcontinental Railroad and what the workers faced while building it. Prior to the building of the First Transcontinental Railroad, people in the west had acquired their own lifestyle completely different from that of the more developed eastern states. Eastern culture, business, and amenities spread to western territories after the completion of the railroad. Not only was the First Transcontinental Railroad a turning point in American history, it is widely considered the most complex and important engineering project of its time.

Such an important event is important to acknowledge, but I hoped to make it relevant to students by showing them what the workers faced as they built the railroads. From the west, the Central Pacific ran into several challenges; among them were a labor shortage and the daunting Sierra Nevada. From the east, the Union Pacific faced similar challenges to a lower degree, but had a completely different experience than the workers of the Union Pacific. If students realize that the men who built the railroad were real people like themselves, they will understand the true significance of the Transcontinental Railroad.

Below are links to the lesson plan and other materials:

[Lesson Plan: The First Transcontinental Railroad](#)

[PowerPoint for Notes](#)

[Notes Handout](#)

[Station Readings](#)

[Visual Aids](#)

[Question Packets](#)

[Overnight Camp handouts](#)