



BIG IDEA:

Railroads have played a large role in the development of the United States from the industrial revolution in the northeast to the settlement in the west. Railroads have increased productivity, lowered costs, and have provided job opportunities in the communities in which they travel through. From personnel (dispatching and construction) to the train crew, railroad jobs were often (and still are) long hours and physically demanding. Students will learn more about jobs related to railroads by exploring photos and having facilitated discussions about railroad roles and responsibilities.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will identify and describe various jobs related to trains and begin to understand job responsibilities.

FOCUSED LEARNING STANDARDS:

(2nd Grade) Social Studies 7-Human activities alter the physical environment, both positively and negatively.

(2nd Grade) Social Studies 15-Most people around the world work in jobs in which they produce specific goods and services.

(3rd Grade) Social Studies 6-Evidence of positive and negative human modification of the environment can be observed in the local community.

(3rd Grade) Social Studies 7-Systems of transportation and communication move people, products, and ideas from place to place.

MATERIALS:

Picture cards dispatcher, whiteboard or chart paper for recording, key vocabulary on chart paper or word bank, books about railroad jobs/access to vetted internet resources

KEY VOCABULARY:

Conductor, engineer, fireman, dispatcher, signal operator, switch, box car, passenger car, coal, caboose, turntable, roundhouse

STEPS:

- 1) Write key vocabulary words on chart paper or a word bank wall. Reference the words frequently and reinforce definitions.
- 2) Ask students if they have ever traveled on a train before. Have students describe the things they saw on the train, including people. Prompt employee descriptions, if necessary.
- 3) Introduce the concept of “railroad jobs” and explain that just like a team, different people have specific jobs to make sure the trains run safely and efficiently.
- 4) Display picture cards of different railroad jobs one by one, describing each job’s responsibilities and how it contributes to the functioning of the railroad after questioning. Engage in a class discussion first by asking questions like:
 - “What do you think a conductor (engineer, signal operator, track maintenance personnel, ticket agent, dispatcher) does on a train?”
 - “Why is the engineer a very important person on the train?”
 - “What would happen if the train depot did not have ticket agents?”
- 5) Divide students into small groups and assign each group a different railroad job. Ask the group to create a poster or drawing that highlights their assigned job and significance. Students can use books or vetted websites to find out more information about their assigned job. Have each group present their poster to the class.
- 6) Share additional books about railroad travel and railroad jobs, such as *Locomotive* by Brian Floca, *Railroad Engineer Olive Davis* by Kaye Baillie, and *Steam, Smoke, and Steel: Back in Time with Trains* by Patrick O’Brien.

DISCUSSION:

Ask students the following reflection questions:

- Describe the similarities and differences between railroad jobs.
- Can you think of additional railroad jobs that we did not discuss in class?

Students can also write short paragraphs about a railroad job they find interesting, explaining the job’s responsibilities and why they think it is important for a functioning railroad system.