

Landmark Events in American History



The Transcontinental Railroad

Teacher's Guide written by Susan Nations, M.Ed.

Series Overview:

The *Landmark Events in American History* series examines important events in the history of the United States. It explores the causes and significance of key moments and developments and takes a fresh look at both myths and heroes. The legacies of these events, whether good or bad, are also explained. Each book is 48 pages in length and includes both full-color photos and archival illustrations. In addition, each book uses an array of informational text features to bring alive these stories of the nation's past, from the cultures of ancient America to the turning points of recent times.

Features of Informational Text:

Each title in the series *Landmark Events in American History* is filled with such features as clear maps, charts, time lines, archival illustrations, and primary-source documents that enhance and supplement the running text. These important features of informational text invite student inquiry and investigation both in the classroom and independently.

The Transcontinental Railroad:

The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad was an extraordinary feat of engineering for its time. This book tells the story of the railroad and shows how the technical challenges and huge scale of the task were overcome by the hard labor of thousands of workers. It looks at the background to the project: an expanding nation hungry for land and the powerful partnership of business and government that formed in response. The book also explains the impact of the railroad, showing how the entire continent opened up to white settlement, how the economy grew, and how the Native peoples of America were finally defeated in their efforts to retain their lands and ways of life.

The following three pages of the Teacher's Guide include:

- Discussion Questions and Inquiries for Readers
- Introduction and prediction
- Reading the Introduction
- Chapter-by-chapter discussion questions and conversation
- Conclusion discussion
- Time Line investigation
- Focus on Informational Text Features
- Vocabulary Building
- Critical Reading Strategies and Test Preparation

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Discussion Questions and Inquiries for Readers:

Introduction and prediction. Prior to reading the book, ask students to browse through each chapter, noticing the subheadings, photos, sidebars, quote boxes, and maps. Ask students to make at least one prediction, based on their browsing, about what they will read in this book. Each student should record his or her prediction(s) on a sticky note. Use these predictions during and after reading to guide your discussions. When you finish the book, let each student confirm or revise his or her prediction(s) based on what was read about the Transcontinental Railroad. Encourage students to use details and information from the text as confirmation.

Read the Introduction (pages 4–5). Students should read this section independently. Remind them to read the photo captions and study the map as well reading the text. Ask students to revisit their original predictions. Ask if anyone wants to revise his or her prediction(s) based on reading this section.

Chapter 1: A Growing Nation (pages 6–11). Read the opening paragraphs on page 6 together and discuss how rapidly railroads expanded in the United States. Students can then read the chapter independently or with a partner. Remind them that in addition to reading the running text, they need to think about the photos, sidebars, and captions as they think about the expanding nation. Ask each student to discuss what he or she learned with a partner.

Chapter 2: Making Plans (pages 12–17). Invite students to browse through pages 12–17. As they skim and scan, ask them to note how the photos, captions, sidebars, and quote boxes enhance the text. Students can read the chapter independently or with a partner. When they are finished, let each student select an interesting fact or piece of information to read to the group. Remind students that when they read, they need to read fluently and with meaning.

Chapter 3: Building the Railroad (pages 18–29). Divide this chapter into parts using the subheadings. Assign one or more students to read each part. Ask each student to summarize his or her reading in writing. Remind students that summaries are only a few sentences that tell the most important information from the reading. Students can share their summaries with the group.

Chapter 4: From Coast to Coast (pages 30–35). Students can read this chapter independently. After they read, ask students to discuss each photo and illustration in the chapter. Students should use the information from the photos and illustrations to discuss the impact the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad had on many U.S. citizens.

Chapter 5: The Railroad Brings Change (pages 36–41). Use the following questions to guide your discussion of this chapter:

- Explain the Homestead Act.
- How did the railroad help ranchers in the west?
- How did the railroad affect the Native American population?
- How does the map on page 41 help the reader understand the Transcontinental Railroad?

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Conclusion (pages 42–43). After students read the conclusion of the book, explain that after reading, readers can confirm or revise their original predictions. Revisit the sticky notes the students created prior to reading. Were their predictions accurate? Do they need to be revised? Have each student write a summary of the book using the information from the revised predictions. You may also want them to illustrate the summaries. Post these in your classroom so that other students can gather information about the Transcontinental Railroad.

Time Line (page 44). Invite each student in the group to select an event from the Time Line. Students should write as many facts about their entry as they can. Encourage students to use the Index of the book, on pages 47–48, to locate further information. Let each student share his or her facts about the event without telling its name. The remainder of the group listens to the description, scans the text and the Time Line, and guesses which event is being described.

Choose one of the following activities to invite students to revisit the text:

Focus on Informational Text Features: Photographs and illustrations and their accompanying captions are an important informational text feature. Ask each student to revisit a chapter from the book *The Transcontinental Railroad* and browse through the photos and illustrations. Discuss how each photo or illustration enhances the chapter. Students can select a fact or piece of information from the chapter that is not shown in a picture but could be depicted through an illustration. Each student should create his or her own illustration and caption to add to the chapter. Let students share their illustrations and captions with the rest of the group.

Vocabulary Building: After reading this text, each student should select a chapter or section to revisit. Ask each student to select an interesting subheading and the text following it from his or her chapter or section. Students should read their selected text and think about the most important vocabulary contained there. Remind them that key vocabulary words are those that are directly related to the topic and help the reader understand it better. Also remind them that key vocabulary is often referenced in the Index of an informational text. Students can use page 4 of this guide as they identify important words that they think may be found in the Index of this book. For an additional activity, students can select up to five words from their lists that are not in the Glossary of the book (on page 45) to add to the Glossary.

Critical Reading Strategies and Test Preparation: Strategic readers know how to identify the most important information in the text. Select a chapter from the book *The Transcontinental Railroad* to revisit with the group. Give each student three to five small sticky notes to locate the most important information in the chapter on his or her own. Share and compare where students placed their sticky notes. Discuss how you determine the most important information. Explain that using a sticky note or other type of place marker is a way to identify important information when you cannot write in the book. Let students practice this reading strategy using other informational texts.

