

Joseph's Railroad Dreams

Lesson 4: Reader's Theater

Focus Questions

What was train travel like for passengers in the 1890s?
What was train travel like for railroad employees in the 1890s?
How did train travel change between the 1850s and the 1890s?

Core Understandings

Students will understand that the railroads had a major impact on the development of Chicago and the United States. They will understand that railroads enabled ordinary people to travel great distances with comfort and style unimaginable before the 1890s. They will understand how train travel evolved from its early days in the mid-19th century through the 1890s.

Knowledge

Students will know the physical characteristics and amenities of 1890s-era trains as well as various jobs on the train. They will know how people dressed for train travel and what they experienced along the way. They will know that the railroads played a prominent role in transforming Chicago into a local and national transportation hub.

Skills

Students will use their language arts skills to interpret the past and explore different historical perspectives.

Common Core ELA Standards

CCSSR1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSSR2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSSW3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

ISBE Social Science Standards

Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the US.

Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the US, and other nations.

Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the US.

Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the US.

ISBE Fine Arts Standard

Goal 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

In This Lesson

Through a reader's theater performance and comparative thinking exercise, students will understand how train travel evolved from its beginnings in Grandpa's time to Joseph's era in the 1890s. The story element of character is addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Hollie Ware.



Activity

Begin the lesson by having students do a reader's theater performance of *Joseph's Railroad Dreams*.

Afterward, have students write an additional scene from Joseph's point of view, detailing how much the train had changed since his grandfather rode it.

Another option is to get a sheet of butcher-block paper and write "Grandpa" and "Joseph" at the top. Give each student two sticky notes and have them write down how each character feels about train travel. Then have students post their thoughts on the butcher-block paper.

Lesson 4 Home Connection

Have students interview a parent or grandparent about their opinions on a new technology or about their favorite way to travel and why.

Materials & Resources

- **Printouts of the *Joseph's Railroad Dreams* narrative:**
http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/pdf/story/Josephs_Railroad_Dreams_by_Kris_Nesbitt.pdf
- **Butcher-block paper** (optional)
- **Sticky notes** (optional)

Instructional Notes

See the Classroom Activities section on the *Great Chicago Stories* website for tips on facilitating reader's theater.

<http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/classroom/reader.php>

Extension Activities

Have students write a postcard to a friend or family member from their own imaginary train trip in the 1890s.