There’s a Railroad in My Town

Historical Background

“In the late 1820s, South Carolina was not doing well economically. Charleston was losing its economic prominence because it was difficult for Up Country planters to get their products to Charleston for shipment to European or northern markets. Until the 1830s, business had depended on the state to provide good transportation routes. But with Charleston desperate for help, a new plan was devised. A private company, the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company, was organized to build a railroad across the state. The line was to extend from Charleston to Hamburg, which was near Augusta, Georgia. The success of the South Carolina Railway sparked interest in the building of other railroads.”


South Carolina Standards

8-5.3 Summarize the changes that occurred in South Carolina agriculture and industry during the late nineteenth century, including changes in crop production in various regions, and the growth of the textile industry in the Upcountry.
3-5.1 Summarize developments in industry and technology in South Carolina in the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century, including the rise of the textile industry, the expansion of the railroad, and the growth of the towns.
USHC-3.3 Compare economic development in different regions of the country during the early nineteenth century, including agriculture in the South, industry and finance in the North, and the development of new resources in the West.

Objectives

- Students will research the development of the railroad in South Carolina.
- Students will summarize their research findings to explain why the railroad was important to South Carolina.
- Students will create an advertisement enticing businesses to use their town’s rail line.

Time Required

2 class periods

Recommended Grade Level

Middle/High

Lesson Materials

- The South Carolina Railroad Photograph Collection
- Computer lab and internet access for students
- Analyzing Primary Sources sheets. Go to http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html for this resource. (Download the Analyzing Photographs and Prints document)
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Lesson Preparation
1. Visit The South Carolina Railroad Photograph Collection.
2. Click on the “View by Town through Google” tab. A list of cities and a Google map with railroad icons should appear. Click on the name of a town and pictures from the collection should appear. Navigate the site to become more familiar.
3. Use the list of cities in Google Maps to assign individual students or pairs of students.
4. Print the Analyzing Photographs and Prints guide and Primary Source Analysis handout.
5. Develop a list of information that is important for students to understand about the railroad in South Carolina for the debriefing portion of the lesson.

Lesson Procedure
1. Explain to students that they each will be conducting research on railroads and towns in South Carolina. Emphasize that their goals are to analyze the photographs they find and conduct additional research to find out why the railroad was located in that town.
2. Assign town names to individual students or pairs of students.
3. Distribute the “Analyzing Photographs and Prints” guide and Primary Source Analysis handout to students. Preview these handouts with students. Emphasize that the goal is to conduct a thorough analysis of each picture. It is not necessary to answer every question on the guide.
4. Practice analyzing a photograph or two with the whole class.
5. Direct students to visit the railroad collection then click on the “View by Town through Google” tab
6. While at the Google site, students will need to find and click on the name of their assigned town. Pictures will appear.
7. Students should click on each of the pictures and save them to “My Favorites” inside the collection. Have your students save their photographs to be easily accessible the next day.
8. After saving the photographs, students should conduct research to find out why the railroad was important to their town or to tell the history of the railroad in their town.
9. Reconvene after analysis and research to debrief with the whole class. Ask: Why was the railroad important in your town? Collect their feedback on the board.
10. Add information from your own presentation to fill in gaps that may have been missed.
11. Allow time for students to develop a one-page advertisement (including photographs from the collection) enticing businesses to use their town’s rail line.
12. Collect their final products, grade then display.

Assessment
Have students write a summary from their research and collective feedback that explains why the railroad was important to South Carolina overall.
Lesson Extension Options

- Students can create a brief PowerPoint presentation using the photographs that they analyzed.
- Students can create a 3 minute podcast using Moviemaker or any other movie production software to present their research findings.

Digital Collections Information

This lesson plan is based on images and/or documents derived from the South Carolina Railroads Photograph Collection available from the University of South Carolina’s Digital Collections Library.

To see other collections that may be helpful to your search, visit the Digital Collections homepage or visit SCDL’s collections.