

Joseph's Railroad Dreams

Lesson 5: Character Study

Essential Questions

What was train travel like in the 1890s? What was it like to work on a train in the 1890s?

Desired Understandings

Students will understand that railroads enabled ordinary people to travel great distances with comfort and style unimaginable before the 1890s. They will understand that the railroad offered positive yet sometimes challenging employment opportunities.

Knowledge

Students will know the physical characteristics and amenities of 1890s-era trains as well as various jobs on the train, especially that of porter.

Skills

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

Illinois Learning Standards

English Language Arts

- Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.
- Goal 2: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras, and ideas.
- Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.
- Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.
- Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Social Science

- Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the United States.
- Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.
- Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the United States.
- Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

Fine Arts

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

In This Lesson

By writing a first-person character study and engaging in a final creative project, students will explore in depth what it was like to be a railroad porter in the 1890s. The story elements of character and obstacles/problems are addressed. This lesson was researched and written by Hollie Ware.



Activity

Begin the lesson by reading aloud Chapters 4 and 5 of *Joseph's Railroad Dreams*, which feature the porter character. As students listen, have them create a list of the porter's responsibilities on the train. Then have each student write their own first-person account of what they think life would have been like as a porter in the 1890s. Afterward, divide students into small groups to read their character studies aloud.

Another option is to get a piece of butcher-block paper and write "porter" across the top. Give each student two sticky notes and have them record the pros and cons of being a porter. Hang this in the room to assist students in their final projects.

Lesson 5 Home Connection: Final Project

Each student should choose one final project option.

Option 1: Travel Brochure

After a brief discussion on the purpose of a brochure, have students create their own travel brochure that includes maps, a dining menu, amenities, decor, destinations, and other interesting facts.

Option 2: Joseph's Travel Diary

Have students imagine that they are Joseph and write three mock diary entries about the beginning, middle, and end of his trip (at least one page). Students can also add illustrations that depict what he saw.

Option 3: Porter's Diary

Have students imagine they are a porter in the 1890s and write three mock diary entries about the good and bad aspects of working on a train (at least one page).

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

Develop a rubric for the final project and share it with students so they clearly understand the grading requirements.

Extension Activities

Have students pretend the porter is their father and write him a letter about their feelings about his job.

Have students read *A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter* by Patricia McKissack and Fredrick McKissack.