

Focus Question:

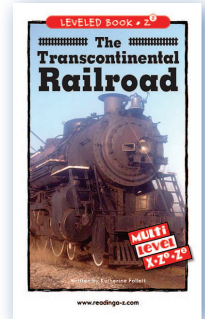
How did the Transcontinental Railroad connect the eastern and western United States?

Book Summary

Text Type: Nonfiction/Informational

How could anyone build something as big and expensive as a railroad across the immense, rugged American West? *The Transcontinental Railroad* addresses the laborious and often dangerous process of connecting the United States from east to west. Historic photographs support detailed and engaging text. Students will have the opportunity to practice the skills of identifying main ideas and details and summarizing to understand the text.

The book and lesson are also available for levels X and Z1.



Lesson Essentials

Instructional Focus

- ☐ Summarize to understand text
- ☐ Determine main idea and supporting details
- ☐ Describe information provided by photographs
- ☐ Recognize and use past-tense verbs
- ☐ Identify and use closed compound words

Materials

- ☐ Book: *The Transcontinental Railroad* (copy for each student)
- ☐ Main idea and details, past-tense verbs, closed compound words worksheets
- ☐ Discussion cards
- ☐ Book quiz
- ☐ Retelling rubric

Vocabulary

Boldface vocabulary words also appear in a pre-made lesson for this title on VocabularyA-Z.com.

• Words to Know

Story critical: *discrimination* (n.), *engineers* (n.), *immigrants* (n.), *laborers* (n.), *pursuit* (n.), *veterans* (n.)

Enrichment: *diligently* (adv.), *infamous* (adj.), *portrayed* (v.), *settlers* (n.), *telegraph* (n.), *treacherous* (adj.)

- **Academic vocabulary:** *allow* (v.), *areas* (n.), *protect* (v.), *route* (n.), *several* (adj.), *task* (n.)

Guiding the Reading

Before Reading

Build Background

- Display a map of the United States for the class. Ask students how people in modern-day culture are able to travel throughout the country. List these modes of transportation on the board. Point out that people were traveling across the country long before many of these modern-day inventions. Have students turn to a partner and discuss how people were able to cross the United States before the invention of modern transportation. Invite volunteers to make estimates about the amount of time it took people to cross the country before modern transportation. Point out that the trip was nearly six months long and very challenging and dangerous. Have volunteers offer suggestions as to why U.S. citizens would have pushed for a railroad that crossed the country.

Introduce the Book

- Give students their copy of *The Transcontinental Railroad*. Guide them to the front and back covers and read the title. Have students discuss what they see on the covers. Encourage them to offer ideas as to what type of book it is (genre, text type, and so on) and what it might be about.
- Show students the title page. Discuss the information on the page (title of book, author's name).
- Preview the table of contents on page 3. Remind students that the table of contents provides an overview of the book. Ask students what they expect to read about in the book, on the basis of what they see in the table of contents. (Accept all answers that students can justify.)

Introduce the Comprehension Skill:

Main idea and details

- Explain to students that every book has a *main idea*, which is the most important idea of the book. Point out that *details* are the information in the book that supports the main idea. Invite students to review the title and cover pages of the book. Have them turn to a partner and make a prediction about the main idea of the book.

Guiding the Reading (cont.)

- Have students turn to page 3 and review the table of contents. Point out that oftentimes in a nonfiction book, the text is broken into sections and that these sections are listed in the table of contents. Explain that each section of the book contains a main idea and supporting details and that the title of each section is often a good clue about the main idea. Have students work with a partner to predict the main idea of each section on the basis of the information in the table of contents. Invite students to share their findings with the class.

Introduce the Reading Strategy: Summarize

- Remind students that engaged readers pause while they are reading to consider the most important details in the text and summarize what they have read. Review with students that a summary of a nonfiction book always includes the main idea and the most important supporting details. Point out that a summary also includes information such as *who*, *what*, *where*, *why*, and *when*. Explain that a summary may be created for the entire book or for each section of the book.
- Have students independently read the introduction. Invite them to turn to a partner and identify the main idea and supporting details of this section. Have students work independently to create a written summary of this section. Remind students to include transitional words such as *first*, *next*, *then*, *finally*, and *so on*. Have students share their summaries with a partner. Partners should share feedback on the quality of the summary.

Vocabulary

Have students turn to the “Words to Know” box on the copyright page. Discuss each word with students. Then, have students turn to the glossary on pages 23 and 24. Explain that the glossary provides definitions for the vocabulary words in the book. Point out the use of each content word and academic vocabulary word in the book, and then use each word in a different model sentence. Have students work in groups to create posters for these words. Have them include on each poster the word and its part of speech, the definition, the word in an example sentence, and a picture illustrating the meaning of the word.

Set the Purpose

- Have students read to find out more about the Transcontinental Railroad. Write the Focus Question on the board. Invite students to look for evidence in the book to support their answer.
- Have students make a small question mark in their book beside any word they do not understand or cannot pronounce. These can be addressed in a future discussion.

During Reading

Text-Dependent Questions

As students read the book, monitor their understanding with the following questions. Encourage students to support their answers by citing evidence from the book.

- *How did Manifest Destiny influence the creation of the Transcontinental Railroad?* (level 1) page 4
- *Why was there a need for a railroad that could cross the United States?* (level 2) pages 4 and 5
- *What problems stood in the way of starting the construction of a transcontinental railroad?* (level 1) page 6
- *How did the Pacific Railroad Act orchestrate the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad?* (level 2) pages 7 and 8
- *What was the cost of building the Transcontinental Railroad to Native Americans and Chinese workers?* (level 3) multiple pages
- *What problems did each railroad company face as they continued construction?* (level 2) pages 9–19
- *What was the effect of the Transcontinental Railroad on the growth of the United States?* (level 3) multiple pages

Text Features: Photographs

Explain that photographs are helpful when reading because they provide the reader with important information. Have students work with a partner to review the photographs on pages 9 and 10. Ask students: *Why would the author choose to include photographs rather than illustrations? How do these photographs support the text on these pages? How do these photographs give you information beyond what is stated in the text?* Have students review other photographs in the book and discuss with a partner why the author chose each photograph. Invite volunteers to share their thoughts with the rest of the class.

Skill Review

- Have students independently reread the section titled “Who Will Build the Railroad?” Invite students to work independently to identify the main idea of the section. Ask students how they were able to identify the main idea. Next, have volunteers offer details from the text that support the main idea.
- Assign each student a section of the book to reread. Explain that each student will identify the main idea of the section and at least three supporting details. Have students underline the supporting details in the text. Invite students to share their findings with the class.
- Model identifying key details of the text to create a summary.

Think-aloud: *Effective readers pause at the end of each section of a book to summarize. When summarizing, I will be sure to include the main idea and the most important supporting details.*

Guiding the Reading (cont.)

For example, a summary of the section “Who Will Build the Railroad” might include the following: Although many people wanted a railroad system to connect the eastern and western parts of the United States, there were many reasons that stalled its construction. For example, the building of such a large railroad was too expensive for any one person or company and it seemed as though the technology was lacking. Most important, however, was that the United States was in the middle of the Civil War, and there was great dispute about where the new railroad should be built. Eventually, the Congress passed the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862, and construction of the railroad began in 1863.

- Have students work independently to summarize the section of the book for which they identified the main idea and supporting details. Remind students that a summary includes only the most important details. Invite each group to share their summary with the class.
- Model and discuss how to complete the [main-idea-and-details worksheet](#), using evidence from the text. Have students discuss the details they noted with a partner.

After Reading

Ask students what words, if any, they marked in their book. Use this opportunity to model how they can read these words using decoding strategies and context clues.

Skill Review

Worksheet: Main idea and details

Review the main-idea-and-details worksheet that students completed. Invite volunteers to share with the rest of the class the section from the book they chose to summarize and have students share it with the class. Discuss with students how identifying the main idea and supporting details helps to create an effective and concise summary.

Comprehension Extension

[Discussion cards](#) covering comprehension skills and strategies not explicitly taught with the book are provided for extension activities.

Response to Focus Question

Have students cite specific evidence from the book to answer the Focus Question. (Answers will vary but students should include the ideas that the Transcontinental Railroad allowed citizens to travel across the country more easily and it encouraged the growth of towns and cities along the tracks.)

Comprehension Checks

- [Book quiz](#)
- [Retelling rubric](#)

Book Extension Activities

Build Skills

Grammar and Mechanics: Past-tense verbs

- Point out that this book addresses historical events, and therefore the details in the text describe things that happened in the past. Review or explain that a *verb* is an action word and by adding the suffix *-ed* to the verb, it becomes a *past-tense verb*, or a word that describes an action that happened in the past.
- Point out that past-tense verbs are not always created by adding the suffix *-ed* to a verb. Write the following words on the board: *build, sleep, have, withdraw*. Have students work independently to record the past-tense form of each verb on a separate piece of paper. Explain that verbs whose spelling is changed in their past-tense form are called *irregular past-tense verbs*. Invite volunteers to the board to record each irregular past-tense verb and use it in a sentence.
- **Check for understanding:** Have students work independently and review pages 7 and 8. Have them underline all of the irregular past-tense verbs found on these pages. Have students share their findings with the class.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the [past-tense-verbs worksheet](#). If time allows, discuss their answers.

Word Work: Closed compound words

- Write the word *businessman* on the board. Ask students which two words were joined together in the word *businessman*. Explain that this word is called a *closed compound word* and that a compound word contains two words that together create one meaning.
- Have students independently reread the section “Who Will Build the Railroad?” and circle the closed compound words. Have students share their findings and write the compound words on the board. Then have students work with a partner to identify each word within a compound word and use the compound word in a complete sentence.
- **Check for understanding:** Ask students to locate all of the closed compound words in the section “Who Will Conquer the Mountains?” Have them list the compound words on a separate piece of paper and identify the two words that make the compound word. Invite students to work with a partner to share their findings. Then have them use each compound word in a complete sentence.
- **Independent practice:** Introduce, explain, and have students complete the [closed-compound-words worksheet](#). If time allows, have students share their responses.

Connections

- See the back of the book for cross-curricular extension ideas.