

Johnny Cash and the Cotton Belt Railroad

Objectives

1. Students will describe the significance of the Cotton Belt railroad in Arkansas and identify key locations along its route.
2. Students will analyze the lyrics of “Ridin’ on the Cotton Belt”

Guiding Questions:

1. What was the significance of railroads, such as the Cotton Belt, to Arkansas and the United States?
2. How do the lyrics of “Ridin’ on the Cotton Belt” by Johnny Cash describe the railroad and its importance to local laborers?

Standards Correlation:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information with other information in print and digital texts

G.2.7.1 Examine creative work as examples of cultural heritage

E.7.7.1 Discuss economic wants and needs of people over time

G.3.6.1 Describe the location of major cities in Arkansas and the United States and the availability of resources and transportation in those areas

Key Terms

railroad, Cotton Belt, migrant worker, Depression

Materials

- computer with Internet access, LCD projector and screen

-PowerPoint presentation, Johnny Cash and “Ridin’ on the Cotton Belt”

-Map of Arkansas, or access to Google Earth

-Printed or projected lyrics for “Ridin’ on The Cotton Belt”

-Prezi

http://prezi.com/c0tqslocaklc/the-transformation-of-transportation-the-railroad/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Opening

Instruct students to write down some of their earliest memories. Ask 2-3 students to share what they have written down and ask them why they think these memories stand out. Transition to the lesson activities by explaining that students will now learn about a memory in Ray Cash’s life, of a very young Johnny Cash, which Johnny Cash inscribed in the song “Ridin’ on the Cotton Belt”

Activities

1. Ask students to brainstorm with a partner about why railroads were significant to the political, economic, and social history of the United States and Arkansas. Invite responses from the class, and write them on the board. Use the Prezi

http://prezi.com/c0tqslocaklc/the-transformation-of-transportation-the-railroad/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy to illustrate the role of the railroad in U.S. history. Add to the list of significant connections on the board.

2. Use the PowerPoint about the Cotton Belt to structure a discussion about the impact of railroads in early Arkansas. Then, discuss the impact on Johnny Cash’s family. Compare to the significance of the railroad today.

3. Play the song “Ridin’ on The Cotton Belt” by Johnny Cash from

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5PhgNQej04>.

Then, distribute song lyrics, and use the last 5 slides of the PowerPoint presentation to discuss the lyrics and their connection to Arkansas places, as well as Cash’s life.

Closing/Extension

Close with a discussion of the guiding questions for the lesson. If time permits, return to the opening activity, and have the students take the memories they wrote down and turn them into a song, poem, or picture. Encourage them to use locations that are related to their topic as Cash did in his song. Ask for volunteers to read their work or explain their art.

Ridin' On The Cotton Belt by Johnny Cash

Ridin' on the Cotton Belt, Cleveland County's where I long to be.

I got onto Brinkley, and every mile I make is a memory.

This boxcar's cold and windy and the dust goes around in circles in the air.

But my hard times are behind me, and I'm returnin' home so I don't care.

And I'm ridin' on the Cotton Belt railroad line, In the pitchin' rolling rhythm and the noise

Railroad men are friends of mine and I'm ridin' on the Cotton Belt boys.

Ridin' on the Cotton Belt across that little river called Saline

That's where I went fishin' and I hunted in her bottoms as a teen.

Now just ahead's a farmhouse and in the kitchen window there's a light

And I've just got fourteen dollars but I'm taking it myself home tonight,

And I'm ridin' on the Cotton Belt....

Jumpin' off the Cotton Belt ain't easy when she's going forty per,

But I see my wife standin' there hoping that I'm coming home to her.

I got a few new cuts and bruises but this old working hobo's made a home,

So long to your Cotton Belt, thank you for the ride, keep rolling on...

