

THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

Modern Marvels

Panama Canal

Part of Teddy Roosevelt's dream of making America a global power was realized through the construction of the Panama Canal. The French began construction in 1880 but nine years and 20,000 lives later they realized their plans were flawed and abandoned the project. In 1904, construction resumed under American supervision. First, they controlled the diseases that had claimed so many construction workers' lives. Then they developed an innovative design for a series of locks. Their dogged determination paid off when they united the oceans on January 7, 1914.

Panama Canal would be useful for classes on American History, South American History, Maritime History and Science and Technology. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

- [abyss](#)
- [camaraderie](#)
- [catastrophe](#)
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- [embodiment](#)
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- [fumigate](#)
- [futility](#)
- [grueling](#)
- [ingenuity](#)
- [integral](#)
- [isthmus](#)
- [quinine](#)
- [reparations](#)
- [sabotage](#)
- [sovereignty](#)
- [subversive](#)

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Panama Canal a "modern marvel?"
2. What were the "monsters" of the seemingly paradise-like Panama?
3. Malaria posed one of the greatest threats to the canal workers. What is malaria? How is it transmitted? How is it treated?
4. American workers and Panamanian workers labored under different conditions. Why were American workers better paid and housed than Panamanian and Caribbean workers? Discuss the role of racism in the construction of the Panama Canal.
5. Discuss some of the obstacles encountered and overcome in the construction of the Panama Canal.
6. Why did the United States and other countries feel that the canal was necessary? What are the benefits of the canal? What are the drawbacks?
7. What is the purpose of the locks constructed for the canal?

8. How does the construction and maintenance of the canal represent a perfect balance between technology and teamwork? Are there any other structures that can be described this way?
9. Discuss the political implications of the canal, past and present.
10. What is the military value of the canal?
11. Why couldn't the Panama Canal be constructed today?

Extended Activities

1. Create a poster that illustrates the process by which ships pass through the Panama Canal.
2. Create a poster or broadside celebrating the grand opening of the Panama Canal, January 7, 1914.