

# THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

## Modern Marvels

### The Railroads that Tamed the West

This episode of *Modern Marvels* presents the story of the transcontinental railroads. Completed in 1869, the Central and Union Pacific transcontinental railroad united the continent and ushered in an era of unparalleled growth and development. *The Railroads That Tamed the West* chronicles the development of the transcontinental railroads and the evolution of railroad technology that made railroad travel inexpensive, safe and fast, resulting in an explosion of transcontinental travel and freight shipping.

This program would be useful for classes on American history, Science and Technology, Social and Cultural History, Economics and Civics. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

- aspiring
- atrocious
- enticed
- epitomized
- expeditions
- exploit
- extricated
- grandeur
- incensed
- ironic
- nitroglycerin
- pristine
- replicate
- simultaneously
- terrain
- tribulations
- watershed

### Discussion Questions

1. Railroad travel today is relatively safe and efficient, but it was not always this way. In the early days of railroad travel, conditions, were at best, inconvenient, at worst, they could be deadly. What were some of the problems and hazards of early railroad travel? How were these problems eventually solved?
2. Even though the dangers of railroad travel were numerous and severe, people still rode and worked on the railroads. Why would people choose to travel or work in such dangerous conditions?
3. The name Westinghouse is associated in American business with electrical appliances, but the founder of the company, George Westinghouse, claimed his fortune with an invention he sold to the railroads. What was Westinghouse's invention, and how did it revolutionize the railroad industry?
4. George Pullman made his fortune creating luxurious railroad cars that catered to the comforts of the wealthy. How do Pullman's cars reflect the era of industrialization in America?
5. What role did the railroads play in the drama of immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?
6. How did the railroads contribute to the explosion in western settlement in the 19th century? How did the U.S. government aid the railroads' contributions?

7. The continental United States is divided into four standard time zones. How did the advent of the continental railroads necessitate this system of standard time?

### **Extended Activities**

1. Imagine that you a passenger on one of the first runs on the Central and Union Pacific transcontinental railroad. Write a diary or journal that chronicles your trip and all the new and wondrous sights and experiences.
2. Create a trip itinerary for a cross country vacation before the development of the transcontinental railroad. What modes of transportation would you use? How long would it take?
3. Design your own luxury Pullman car.