

Trains Near You

Parent Guide, page 1 of 1

Read the “Directions” sheets for specific instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, you and your child will find and explore a local place that is connected to trains, such as a train station, a train museum, or train tracks.

WHY

Visiting a place outside of school can help children understand how history and ideas connect to the real world. Learning outside the classroom can also inspire children to ask more and better questions about the world around them.

TIME

- 50 minutes or more

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in kindergarten through 4th grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- Locomotive: the vehicle that produces the power that pulls a train.

GET READY

- Read Patricia Newman’s book *Jingle the Brass* together. *Jingle the Brass* is a book about a young boy who learns words used by railroad workers of the steam-engine era while on a train trip. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/train/train_reading.pdf).
- Read the Step Back in Time sheet.

YOU NEED

- Tips sheets (*attached*)
- Directions sheets (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- Computer with Internet access
- Camera or art supplies
- Transportation (*possibly*)

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.



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Step Back in Time, page 1 of 2

For more information, visit the National Museum of American History Web site <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

Railroads have moved people and cargo around America for more than 180 years. The first steam-powered locomotives began to appear around 1830, and were very important to land transportation by the 1850s. By 1860, there were roughly 31,000 miles of track in the country, mostly in the Northeast, but also in the South and Midwest.

As the rail system grew, it connected the lives of Americans across the country. By 1893, almost any town could receive food and goods from any section of the country within a week or two. In the 1920s, trains delivered daily mail and express packages and long-distance travel was available to even more people.



The “John Bull” was one of the first successful locomotives in the United States. It ran for the first time in November, 1831.

Facts and Fiction

The words and illustrations in *Jingle the Brass* represent a mix of fantasy and facts about steam locomotives in American history. For example, the illustrations of hobos are comical and in general practice a child would not ride in the cab of a locomotive. For readers interested in “just the facts,” we recommend the nonfiction book *The John Bull: A British Locomotive Comes to America* by David Weitzman.

From the 1830s through the 1950s, people traveled in trains pulled by steam locomotives. Cars in these trains were almost always arranged in a specific order. Coal-burning steam engines sent smoke and cinders into the air, so the most **privileged** passengers sat as far away from the locomotive as possible. The passenger cars—the coaches—were separated from the locomotive by the mail and baggage cars.

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It took many people to make the railroad system work.

- The conductor was the “captain” of the train; he was in charge of the train crew, looked out for the safety of everyone aboard, and made sure that every passenger paid the correct fare.
- Two crew members worked in the engine’s cab: the engineer ran the locomotive, and the fireman managed the boiler and helped watch for signals. Both jobs were highly skilled.
- On trains with luxurious sleeping cars, people called “Pullman Porters” took care of passengers’ needs, like helping with luggage and tidying up the passenger area.
- Other “behind the scenes” railroad workers included the business clerks, track workers, signal tower workers, and express package agents.

The railroads that cross the country, mostly because of the food, coal, cars, and other goods that travel by rail, still have an impact on our lives. Many Americans still travel by rail, on diesel-powered locomotives, streetcars, subways, and commuter trains.

For more information, visit the *America on the Move* online exhibition at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/>.

Locomotive: the vehicle that produces the power that pulls a train.

Cinders: very small pieces of burned material, such as wood or coal.

Privileged: having special rights or advantages that most people do not have, such as money.

Luxurious: very comfortable and expensive.

Diesel: a specific type of oil fuel.

Commuter trains: trains that carry travelers regularly to and from places, especially between their homes and workplaces.

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For adults and kids to follow together.

1. Decide on your best opportunity for learning about trains.
 - a. If you live in or near a big city, you might be able to visit a train station where passenger trains pick up and drop off. Does your city have a commuter train or subway that moves people locally? Or does Amtrak have a station near you for trains that travel to other cities? Amtrak's online atlas can help you find the closest station to your home (<http://tickets.amtrak.com/secure/content/routeatlas/>).

Tip

Every year, Amtrak celebrates National Train Day. Find out more at <http://www.nationaltrainday.com/>.

- b. Do an Internet search to find the closest train museum to your home. Or do an Internet or GoogleMaps (maps.google.com) search for your state and "train museum" or "railroad museum." For example, use Google to search for "train museum" and "Kansas." Also consider visiting "Railmuseum.com" for their listing of North American railroad museums.
- c. Check the online national atlas (<http://www.nationalatlas.gov/natlas/Natlasstart.asp>) to find the closest train that passes your area. You may be able to find a safe place where you can watch the trains pass.

Tip

For tips on using the online national atlas, visit (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/v/atlastutorial.html>).

The CSX Corporation Rail System (<http://www.csx.com/index.cfm/customers/maps/csx-system-map/>) has an extensive rail system east of the Mississippi River. Their detailed map tool could also help you find tracks.

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2. Pick the best ThinkAbouts sheet for your adventure.
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3. Travel to your destination.
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Tip

Tip: While you're traveling, sing or listen to songs related to trains, like "I've Been Working on the Railroad." And if you really love singing about trains, take a look at the related OurStory activity "Sing, Play and Cook Railroad-Style" (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/train/train_play.pdf).

4. Use your ThinkAbouts sheet to explore your destination together.
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For more activities about trains in American history and *Jingle the Brass*, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

Trains Near You

ThinkAbouts for exploring a train station, page 1 of 2

Planning suggestions:

- Search the Internet to find out if the train station has a website. If it does, find out the station's hours and what times a train will be stopping at the station.
- What other stations can you travel to from your train station? Many local transit companies post their system maps online. Or, if you'll be visiting an Amtrak passenger station, visit the online atlas to find out more about your station (<http://tickets.amtrak.com/secure/content/routeatlas/>).

Safety tips:

- **IMPORTANT:** Operation Lifesaver Inc. has a full list of safety instructions and warnings on their website (http://www.oli.org/education_resources/safety_tips.htm). Make learning about safety an important part of your trip by reviewing these safety tips before you leave home!
- Always follow the instructions of workers at the train station. Listen for announcements such as when to stand back from the platform's edge or when a train is arriving.
- Keep your eyes open for any important signs or labels. If you are allowed to go near the platform, some stations mark off the edge of the platform, so you're certain not to fall in the tracks.

During the trip:

- Look around. Does your train station have a place to buy tickets? A place to rest while waiting for the train? A map or listing of the trains that will come to that station? A clock? Do you see a schedule of arrivals and departures? If so, can you see any patterns in the schedule (for example, more trains in the morning)?
- Listen closely. What sounds do you hear at the train station? When the train is arriving, what sounds do you hear?

Tip

At many large stations, only passengers with tickets can get near the trains, try to encourage children to explore the station's other features,



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even if you can't approach the trains themselves.

- Ask someone who works at the station:
 - What is your job?
 - What is your favorite thing about your job?
 - What other jobs are connected to this train station?
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After the trip:

- Draw a picture of something you saw at the train station: a train, a ticket booth, another passenger.
 - Do research into one of the destinations you could reach by riding a train from your train station. What is that place like? Why do you think people would want to go there?
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For more activities about trains in American history and *Jingle the Brass*, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

Trains Near You

ThinkAbouts for watching trains, page 1 of 2

Planning suggestions:

- Although passenger trains, like Amtrak or commuter lines, often have published schedules, freight trains don't usually post their schedules for the public. To reduce your wait, ask someone who lives or works near the tracks what time(s) train(s) pass by.

Safety tips:

- **IMPORTANT:** Operation Lifesaver Inc. has a full list of safety instructions and warnings on their website (http://www.oli.org/education_resources/safety_tips.htm). Make learning about safety an important part of your trip by reviewing these safety tips before you leave home!

Before the trip:

- Review the safety instructions from Operation Lifesaver.
- Talk about how you will find a safe place to watch a train. Is there a nearby parking lot where you can watch from a safe distance? Do you know someone whose house is near a train track?
- Try to find out what railroad system your train tracks are connected to. Do you think you'll see trains carrying people or freight? Will the trains be traveling locally or to another city?

During the trip:

- Can you see any signals along this length of track?
- When a train comes by, see if you can read any words, letters, colors, pictures or numbers on the outside of the cars. Do they give you a hint about what's inside them? What did you hear or feel as the train comes near? Count the number of cars on the train.

Tip

It can be helpful to pick a specific point to watch and count the number of cars that pass that point. If a train is going slowly, you might lose count.

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Just start again and make an estimate of how many cars might have passed.

After the trip:

- Describe your trip to the train tracks to someone else. Be sure to talk about:
 - How you stayed safe
 - What the train looked and sounded like

For more activities about trains in *American history* and *Jingle the Brass*, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>).

Trains Near You

ThinkAbouts for exploring a train museum, page 1 of 2

Planning suggestions:

- Search the Internet to find out as much as you can about the museum. Find out about the visiting hours, any special programs, and if there is a cost to visit the museum.

Tip

Some train museums organize special steam excursions in the fall when visitors can ride on steam trains. Find out if the train museum nearest you offers one of these special programs and consider planning a steam excursion into your trip.

Before the trip:

- If the museum has a website, explore the site together. Are there any specific objects you're excited about seeing?
- Make a list of any questions you have about trains. You could ask about railroads in general, the technical details of how railroads work, trains in your local area, or anything else you can imagine.

During the trip:

- Search the exhibitions for answers to your questions. If you can't find the answers in the exhibitions, consider asking a staff person, such as a docent or tour guide.
- Pick a favorite object at the museum. Draw a sketch or take a picture of the object.
- Look for locomotives that are from different time periods. How are the earlier and later trains the same? How are they different? Be sure to look at the locomotives themselves as well as the labels in the exhibitions.

After the trip:

- Explore the *America on the Move* website (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/>) from the National Museum of American History. Can you find a train that looks similar to the ones you saw at the museum near you?

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- Add words from *Jingle the Brass* to your picture of a train. What would the conductor of your train say? Can you label parts of your picture with train words?
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For more activities about trains in American history and *Jingle the Brass*, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

Trains Near You

For Teachers

Read the “Parent Guide” and “Directions” sheets for specific instructions.

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- use senses to describe a location or experience.
- develop questions related to a specific location or experience.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Accurately describes a location or experience.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

- 2A. Examine local architecture and landscape to compare changes in function and appearance over time.
- 4A. Formulate historical questions.
- 4B. Obtain historical data from a variety of sources.

K-4 Historical Content Standards

- 8B. The student understands changes in transportation and their effects.

21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/train/>.

