

John Bull Riding the Rails

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Read the “Talk Together Tips” sheets for specific discussion questions.

SUMMARY

In this activity children will watch and discuss a short video about an early American steam locomotive, the John Bull.

WHY

Seeing historical objects as they were used in the past helps children develop an understanding of the impact of those objects on the people of the past. In this example children can understand more about the mechanics of the train, the train workers, and the train passengers.

TIME

- 10 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

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

CHALLENGE WORDS

(definitions from *Merriam-Webster’s Learner’s Dictionary*, www.learnersdictionary.com)

- Operable: able to be used.
- Locomotive: the vehicle that produces the power that pulls a train.
- Engines: machines that change energy (such as heat from burning fuel) into motion.
- Wilderness: a wild and natural area in which few people live.
- Industrial Revolution: the major social and economic changes that occurred in Britain, Europe, and the United States in the late 18th and early 19th centuries when new machinery, new sources of power, and new ways of manufacturing products were developed.
- Import: a product brought into a country to be sold.

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

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- Assemble: to connect or put together the parts of (something, such as a toy or machine).
- Adapt: to change (something) so that it functions better or is better suited for a purpose.

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

- Talk Together Tips sheets (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- Computer with Internet access (*video at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/v/johnbull.html>*)
- Speakers or headphones

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



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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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Before You Watch:

Have you ever gone for a ride on a train or seen a train moving?

What sounds do trains make?

While You Watch:

Look out for these important parts of the locomotive: the fire burning wood, the boiler tank full of water to make steam, and the chimney. These parts all work together to power the wheels and make the locomotive move on the track.

Imagine you are riding on the train. What would you hear or smell? How would you feel about traveling so fast?

Watch the people who are working on the locomotive. Take note of the different tasks they perform in order to make the train run smoothly.

After You Watch:

The John Bull locomotive ran at 25 to 30 miles per hour. Is that faster than you can walk? Run? Ride a bike? Ride in a car? Ride in a plane?

Tip

Here are a few speeds to consider: The 2008 Olympic gold medal marathon racer ran about 26 miles in 2 hours and 6 minutes, or about 12.5 miles per hour. The top speed of a passenger plane retired in 1999 and now part of the collection of the National Air and Space Museum was 595 miles per hour (<http://www.nasm.si.edu/exhibitions/gal102/americanbyair/jetage/jetage07.cfm>).

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Draw a picture of the John Bull moving along the tracks. Write in the sounds that the locomotive makes as it moves.

Did anything in the video surprise you? Talk about how the John Bull was like or unlike any trains you've seen before.

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

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For Teachers

Read the “Parent Guide” and “Talk Together Tips” sheets for specific discussion questions.

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- describe a steam locomotive in action.
- state how steam locomotives influenced the experiences of the people who worked on and traveled by trains.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Accurately describes steam locomotives in action
- Stated impacts on people of the past are logical and supported by evidence (from the video, Step Back in Time sheet, or other background knowledge)

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

2H. Draw upon the visual data presented in photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

4B. Obtain historical data.

K-4 Historical Content Standards

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

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

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