COMPETING FOR RAILROADS

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OVERVIEW

Students will use primary and secondary sources to learn about the role of transportation in the growth of mining towns and the development of the Colorado Territory.

STANDARDS

History Standard 2: Students know how to use the processes and resources of historical inquiry.

History Standard 4: Students understand how science, technology, and economic activity have developed, changed, and affected societies throughout history.

Geography Standard 2: Students know the physical and human characteristics of places, and use this knowledge to define and study regions and their patterns of change.

Geography Standard 4: Students understand how economic, political, cultural, and social processes interact to shape patterns of human populations, interdependence, cooperation, and conflict.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this activity, students will be able to:

- Describe the role of railroads in the development of mining in Colorado.
- Describe the role of geography in determining where railroads were built.
- Assess the pros and cons of building a railroad to different mountain locations.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- How did miners and mining companies use railroads?
- Why were railroads important to the growth of mining towns?
- What were some of the factors that railroad companies considered when deciding where to build railroads?

This activity was developed with funding from the State Historical Fund.

PROCEDURE

1. This activity will require the use of the following historical photographs:
   MINING TRANSPORTATION THEME
   Railroad Sequence: All photos

2. Students can access these photographs in one of the following ways:
   - Send students individually or in small groups to the computer station to examine the photos on a CD-ROM or Internet site while other students are working on other assignments.
   - Print out and copy the photographs, giving copies to each group of students.
   - Send the class to a computer lab where all the students can examine the photographs on the Internet site at the same time.
   - Use a multi-media projector or an overhead projector with an LCD panel to project the CD-ROM- or Internet-site screen for the entire class to see.

3. Ask the students think about why railroads were important to Colorado mining towns and the role of geography in determining where railroads were built as they examine the photographs. Afterwards conduct a discussion focused on these questions.

4. Then divide the class into the following groups:
   - Citizens of Coalville (assign roles, such as shopkeeper, livery stable owner, banker, miner, etc.)
   - Citizens of Goldton (see above)
   - Stockholders and Directors of the Great Western Railroad

5. The railroad representatives plan to build a railroad to <u>one</u> of the two towns. The citizens of each town must try to persuade the railroad agents why it will be to the town's and the railroad's advantage to built to their town rather than to the other one. The railroad representatives will record the pros and cons of each town as the basis for a decision.

6. Distribute Handout 1 and Handout 2 sheets (see below) to both groups of citizens (but not to the railroad agents):

7. After the students have presented their case for the railroad building to their town, the stockholders and directors must make a decision. They should decide in favor of the town they believe will make the most money for the railroad. They must then explain their decision to the townspeople.

8. Have students debrief the activity. How has this simulation helped them understand the role railroads played in the development of Colorado during the mining era?

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9. Make connection with the present by asking students to brainstorm ways that different modes of transportation have benefited or detracted from the quality of life in their community.

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Handout 1

Characteristics of Coalville:

- Located in a mountain valley accessible by a gradual incline. The only obstacle in the railroad's path is one mountain range that must be tunneled through (at great expense) or built around (increasing the distance and cost).
- Rise in elevation from the valley floor to Coalville is 2,000 feet in 20 miles. No leveling of land or building of railroad grades required.
- Surrounding forests consist of scrub oak and a few aspen trees, which are not suitable for railroad ties or for construction purposes.
- Local streams provide adequate drinking water, but water for the steam locomotives must be hauled in.
- The coal mines at Coalville are highly productive. They will provide plenty of cheap coal for railroad locomotives.
- The brother-in-law of the president of the Great Western owns many town lots in Coalville.

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Handout 2

Characteristics of Goldton:

- Located in a mountain valley accessible by a steep incline. However, there are no mountains to be tunneled through or built around. There is one river that must be bridged.
- Rise in elevation from the valley floor to Goldton is 5,000 feet in 20 miles. This means the railroad must build costly switchbacks and still more bridges over canyons before it can lay its track.
- Blizzards and avalanches are frequent in the winter.
- Dense old-growth pine forests will provide ample timber for railroad ties and other construction.
- Water for steam locomotives is plentiful.
- There are no coal deposits near Goldton.
- Gold was recently discovered in the Goldton region. Although the future is uncertain, the first mines are fabulous producers of gold ore. The ore must be shipped to mills located at the base of the mountains.

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