

Fifth Grade Informational Text-Based Writing

Railroads in America

Source #1

Full Steam Ahead: The Transcontinental Railroad

On July 4, 1870, a Boston trade official named Alex H. Rice stood on a San Francisco beach. In his hand was a bottle of water from the Atlantic Ocean that he had brought from the East Coast. At a signal from one of the other officials present on this historic day, Rice poured the water into the Pacific Ocean. This ceremony, called “the mingling of the waters,” celebrated what had occurred less than a year before: the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad.

Connecting the two coasts by rail was one of the most important building projects in U.S. history. It turned a collection of states and territories into a united whole, and transformed the nation.

People had been asking for coast-to-coast rail travel for decades. Since the invention of the steam locomotive in 1825, companies had built many rail lines. These railroads connected eastern cities and seaports, slashing travel times and helping these areas grow. Crossing the country, however, was much more difficult. People and trade goods traveled by horse, stagecoach, or wagon train. The trip took months. Not many made the journey.

While the East became crowded, the West remained a wild frontier. People knew, however, that this half of the country was rich in resources. Land was plentiful and perfect for farming. Precious metals lay beneath the earth. Time and distance put these resources out of reach. Government and business leaders believed that where trains traveled, cities and businesses would sprout like corn. In 1862, Congress finally passed the Pacific Railroad Bill, a law that funded railroad companies and granted them land on which to build rails coast to coast.

Two companies immediately got to work. Railroads already existed that stretched from the East to Omaha, Nebraska. Now, the Union Pacific Railroad began extending the tracks from Omaha out to the West. The Central Pacific Railroad began in Sacramento, California and laid tracks to the East. Eventually, the two companies would meet in Promontory, Utah.

It was hard, backbreaking work that required lots of manpower. The Union

Pacific hired Irish immigrants and Civil War veterans to do the job. The Central Pacific hired thousands of workers from China. Laying track westward meant blasting tunnels through the Rocky Mountains. The eastward route took the rails through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Workers from both companies dangled from rocky slopes, hacking holes and placing explosives.

The workers also faced attacks from Native American tribes who lived on lands that were being gobbled up by the tracks. These peoples feared that the railroad would end their way of life.

Laying track was made even more dangerous by the competition between the two companies. The faster they laid track, the more money they earned. A faster pace also made working conditions more dangerous. Yet most workers earned only about \$30 per month. Their efforts made it possible for the railroad to be completed seven years ahead of schedule.

On May 10, 1869, the rails were finally joined in Promontory at the "Golden Spike" ceremony. The final spike, made of gold, was tapped in, and engines driven from east and west met on the tracks. The transcontinental railroad was complete. The nation was about to move forward at top speed.

Source #2

The Chinese Who Laid the Rails

It was 1865, and the Central Pacific Railroad Company had a problem. It needed 4,000 men to lay tracks for the eastbound section of the Transcontinental Railroad. Yet the company could only keep about 800 men on the job. Laying track was tough work performed at an exhausting pace. Workers also risked their lives blasting tunnels through mountains.

Contractor Charles Crocker wanted to hire workers from China. Many of these workers were already here. Chinese peasants had begun arriving in California in 1850. With poverty in their homeland and no chance to earn a living, they had fled across the Pacific. They worked in the mines at the height of the Gold Rush. Later, some became fishermen or servants to the wealthy. Competition over jobs led some Californians to resent the Chinese.

Crocker's foreman distrusted the Chinese and refused to hire them to build the railroad. Then a group of Irish immigrant railroad workers began fighting for higher wages. When they heard that Chinese workers might replace them, they backed down. The Central Pacific officials saw that fear over losing their jobs would make workers settle for less. Now the company went all out to hire Chinese workers. It even advertised in China. By 1868, the Chinese represented 80 percent of the workforce.

The railroad was impressed with how hard the Chinese worked. The men were well organized and met deadlines. Yet, they were still treated unfairly. Chinese workers received only \$30 per month and no food or housing. In contrast, other railroad workers received \$35 per month as well as housing.

Source #3

Railman Charles Crocker

In 1849, an Indiana man named Charles Crocker headed for California. After crossing the Platte Valley in a wagon train, he made it to Sacramento. Crocker didn't know it at the time, but he had just traveled the future route of the Transcontinental Railroad.

In California, Crocker first worked the mines. Then he became a dry goods merchant. His business success caught the attention of the newly formed Central Pacific Railroad. Impressed with his intelligence and commitment, the company gave Crocker its first construction contract.

Crocker had no actual construction experience. So he hired an experienced team to lay the first 18 miles of track. As they worked, Crocker rode along, watching and learning. After taking over the job, his smartest move was hiring Chinese workers. This helped him overcome a severe labor shortage. It also became a key strategy in the competition with the Union Pacific, which laid the westbound track.

The more track each company laid, the more money it made. It was the Chinese men who succeeded in the dangerous, backbreaking work that took the railroad through the Sierra Nevada mountains. Crocker was proud of these accomplishments, and knew he could rely on his workers. After hearing the Union Pacific brag about how fast the company laid track, he decided to prove his own workers' worth. On April 20, 1869, his crews laid ten miles of track across the Utah desert. This put the Central Pacific less than ten miles from the westbound rails. This amazing feat became known as "Victory Day."

Directions:

The sources talked about railroads spanning the country. Write an informative essay in which you explain the purpose of the Transcontinental Railroad, and the challenges the workers face. Use information from the sources in your essay.

Manage your time carefully so that you can:

- Read the passages;
- Plan your responses;
- Write your response; and
- Revise and edit your response.

Be sure to include:

- an introduction
- support for your controlling idea using information from the passages; and
- a conclusion that is related to your controlling idea.

Your writing should be in the form of a well-organized, multi paragraph essa

Fifth Grade Opinion Text-Based Writing

Volunteering: Required or Voluntary?

Source #1

Community Service

Contributing time to your community is effort well spent. There are many things you could do. Lending a helping hand to someone in need does a lot of good. Visiting people who are lonely will brighten both their day and yours. Most towns have different kinds of community service activities. You can usually find an activity that involves something you enjoy.

Senior centers and nursing homes often welcome the kindness of volunteers. You could entertain the elderly with a formal show that your dance school put together, or you could just stop by for a quick visit to say hello. Either way, senior citizens appreciate the effort.

Also, animal shelters are always in need of volunteers to help with the animals. Taking the dogs out for a walk or freshening up a few cages can make a big difference. Animal lovers are sure to find a useful way to spend some of their free time here.

Most of us already pitch in to help take care of the environment. As we all know, recycling is important and necessary, but there is so much more that you could do to improve the area you live in. You could clean up a local beach that you often go to. Another idea is putting some fresh paint on a nearby historical site, or planting flowers there; your work is sure to help make it a nicer place to visit.

The key is volunteering for something about which you feel passionate. Participating in a community service project that is close to your heart can be a very rewarding experience. When you look into which project to participate in, you are sure to be able to find one that will spark your interest.

Source #2

Students Should Give Back to Their Communities

There are so many different ways that people could give back to their communities. Volunteering to participate in a community service project is one of those ways. Every neighborhood needs people to help with getting things done. Many school districts across the country have decided to have their students do their part as members of the community. They now require that their students volunteer a certain number of community service hours each year. Putting this idea into effect makes everyone a winner.

It is common for young people to not completely appreciate all that they may have. Participating in a community service project can change the way students view things. For example, volunteering to clean up a public park would help students realize that it takes hard work to keep that park looking nice and clean. The next time they drop a napkin or wrapper on the ground, they might think twice before leaving it there. They would know that someone else would have to pick it up if they did not. We are all able to better appreciate the things we have when we see how life would be without them.

Having students choose a volunteer project that means something to them is very important. Feeling a connection to the project would increase their interest in it. A student may be thinking that he or she would like a career in medicine. Volunteering at a local hospital might help the student determine if this is the right career choice. This opportunity would give the student hands-on experience in a field of interest.

It is possible that students might not have had the chance to volunteer on a community project until now. They might not have known how to find a program, or they might have been nervous to volunteer on their own. Groups of friends can now participate together in the same project. The school would be able to guide them on how to choose a program that is right for them. One great hope for this requirement is to give students a positive experience with volunteering. This would inspire students to continue volunteering throughout their lives, making a difference for years to come.

The decision to include community service as part of the regular school requirements is the right one. Obviously the community would benefit with more volunteers to help with the projects that need to be completed. In addition, students would have the chance to learn through real life experiences. Not everything can be taught in a classroom or from a book. Sometimes the best way to learn is to do.

Source #3

Volunteering Should Be Voluntary!

Participating in a community service project is a wonderful way to spend your time. It shows that you feel connected to a certain cause in a strong way. It also shows that you are willing to work hard to help that cause. Unfortunately, this isn't always true for everyone who volunteers for a community service project. Some school districts require that their students volunteer a certain number of hours to a community service project. It is true that there is a positive side to having the students do this, but there are also negatives to consider.

When someone volunteers to do something, it should be for the right reasons. Volunteering means that you agree to help another person or cause for free. When students are required to be involved in community service so that they receive school credit, the schools are effectively taking away the true meaning of volunteering. In these situations, students may easily start to develop bad feelings about the whole experience. This may cause them to decide not to volunteer again in the future. The help the community receives would be temporary, but the lasting negative effects for the students could be permanent. This is surely not what the school would want to happen.

What about students who are truly committed to volunteering their time? When they apply to college, they include on their application the time they spent volunteering. This has always been viewed by colleges in a positive way. It shows that these students wanted to give back to their community. If the students volunteered because they had to, should colleges look at the time they spent helping others in the same way? Colleges will need to examine this dilemma as more and more schools begin to require community service.

Another factor to consider is whether students have time in their busy lives to take on community service. Many students are involved in after-school sports or music programs. These commitments already require that the students juggle homework, research projects, and extracurricular activities. Giving them the additional responsibility of community service hours may not be appropriate.

Filling every minute of every day with an activity is too much to ask of anyone, and it is not a healthy way to live. Students who are required to volunteer may find their grades slipping or need to drop an after-school activity. Is having a community service requirement worth those risks?

Being a part of a community service project can bring many people a lot of joy. However, students need to realize and experience that on their own. Forcing it upon students is not the way to make them appreciate the good that volunteering really can accomplish.



Directions:

The passages are about community services. Write an essay in which you give your opinion about whether or not community service should be required for high school graduation. Support your opinion with information from the sources.

Manage your time carefully so that you can:

- Read the passages;
- Plan your responses;
- Write your response; and
- Revise and edit your response.