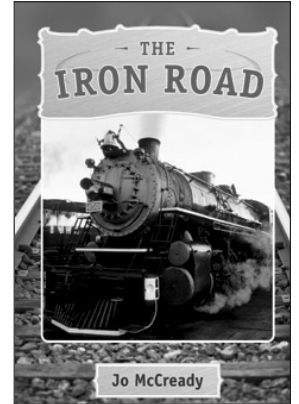


The Iron Road

by Jo McCready



Book Summary

In the 1800s, travelling across Canada was difficult and dangerous. To make it easier, a railway was built across Canada. This book describes the construction of the railway and the difficulties of getting it through.

Features of the Book

- Historical information and photographs
- Geographic information
- Different perspectives of historical events
- Labelled diagram with zoom effects
- Maths in authentic contexts
- Maps
- Specialised vocabulary – nitroglycerine, trestle, rail, spike, sleeper, immigrants

Purpose

The Iron Road can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills and understandings:

- S** identifying problems and solutions in a text;
- S** interpreting text and using it as a source of information;
- S** recognising synonyms and exploring how they are used;
- S** writing a narrative account;
- S** identifying the ways in which transportation has changed people's lives.

Investigation Tools

- What's the Background? – The Dominion of Canada, pages 6–7
- Making Connections – The Trans-Siberian Railway, page 16
- Digging Deeper – The North-west Rebellion, page 18
- Looking Closer – Rails, Spikes, and Sleepers, page 20
- Weighing Both Sides – First Nations, page 24

The Guided Reading Lesson

S Identifying problems and solutions in a text

S Interpreting text and using it as a source of information

You may need to spend extra time familiarising your students with the concepts and specialised vocabulary in this book. This lesson could be taken over two or more days.

Introducing the text

Read the title, the blurb on the back cover, and the contents page together.

- How did people travel before cars, railways, and aeroplanes were invented?
- What would have made travelling difficult?
- Why would the railway take so many people and so many years to build?

Reading and discussing the text

Ask the students to read chapter 1 silently, thinking about why the government agreed to build a railway across Canada. (It was difficult to transport people and goods to British Columbia.) When the students have finished reading, discuss their ideas.

- *What motivated the government to build the railway?*
- *Why did the settlers like the idea?*

Help the students to interpret the map on pages 6–7. Discuss why this background information may have been included and how it will help them to understand the story.

The students can now read to the end of chapter 2, identifying challenges and solutions in the building of the railway as they read. They should use the following questions as prompts:

- *What happened in 1875?*
- *What problem did the government soon have? How did they solve it?*
- *What might have happened if the government hadn't addressed the problem?*

The students can now read chapter 3. When they have finished reading, encourage them to talk about the workers and their challenges.

- *What do you think life was like for the workers?*
- *Why do you think Chinese people came to work on the railway?*
- *What challenges did the workers face?*

Encourage the students to talk about how the workers and the people in charge could have improved the working conditions.

Explain to the students that there are a number of challenges outlined in chapter 4. Encourage them to make a note of the challenges and any solutions as they read the remainder of the book. Early finishers could create a T-chart using this information.

When they have finished reading, discuss the problems that had to be overcome (dangerous terrain, rebellion, time) and the solutions that were found.

Discuss the impact that the railway had on the settlers, the First Nations communities, and trade and industry.

Revisiting the Text

The activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson, during later reading sessions as mini-lessons, or as independent activities.

S Interpreting text and using it as a source of information

Ask the students to return to the text to find how the railway was actually built. This may include information about tools and materials, construction methods, and the geography of the land. Explain to the students that there is no one chapter covering this topic, so they will need to find pieces throughout the text to form a “bigger picture”.

S Recognising synonyms and exploring how they are used


Write “railway” and “railroad” on the board. Ask the students to find both words in the dictionary to demonstrate that they share the same meaning.

- *Why has the author used two different words that have the same meaning?*

Explain to the students that when the same word is used too often in a text, it can seem monotonous so an author uses synonyms such as “railroad” and “railway” to make the text more interesting. Help the students to find other synonyms for railroad (“track” on page 9 and “line” on page 10). Ask the student to find synonyms for “workers” (“labourers” on page 12 and “tracklayers” on page 17). You could show the students how to use a thesaurus to find synonyms.

S Identifying the ways in which transportation has changed people's lives

Ask the student to skim read the text and to identify people whose lives were changed by the railway. Discuss how different people were affected and how they would have felt. The students may like to role-play a main event, showing how people reacted.

 The students could use the blackline master on page 76 to write about the difference that the railway made to people's lives.