Portail de l'éducation de Historica Canada

Canadian National Railway

Overview

In this lesson, students will correlate historical information of the evolution of the Canadian National Railway from its conception to today. Within their research, the students will identify factors that have had an impact on the CN's development, both positively and negatively. Students will explore and determine whether these factors that have effected change over time can be classified as having contributed to progress or decline in the development of the Canadian National's standing in the global environment.

Aims

Prescribed Learning Outcomes:

The student will:

• analyze the development of transportation systems in BC and Canada
• describe the contributions of significant individuals to the development of Canada's identity
• describe how physical geography influenced patterns of settlement, trade and exploration
• assess the role of geographical factors in the development of trade and

settlement in Canada and other colonies
• demonstrate effective research skills, including accessing information, assessing information, collecting data, evaluating data, organizing information and presenting information.

Background

The Canadian National Railway is a transcontinental railway system that amalgamated several railway companies that were in financial difficulties during the early twentieth century. In 1918, the Canadian National took over the Canadian Northern Railway and in 1919 it absorbed the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. The organization of this new, government-owned line was completed by 1923. In the ensuing years it played a major role into expanding the north of British Columbia and the Prairie provinces as well as providing a transcontinental passenger service. It was mainly responsible for opening up Prince George and Prince Rupert and continues to operate freight service to Prince Rupert and Vancouver. In 1995, the company was sold to private interests and in 1999 it completed a takeover of the US Railway, the Illinois Central. To date, CN has approximately 20,264 route-miles (32,611 km) of track in Canada and the US, spanning Canada and mid-America from the Atlantic and Pacific oceans to the Gulf of Mexico.

Activities

Time Allowance: 3 class periods

Procedures:

Lesson Preparation

For the purpose of this exercise, reference will be made to the concepts of continuity and change which, if unfamiliar to students and teachers, can be found on the Historical Thinking website. The teacher (and students) is also encouraged to read the material under the History section on the CN website, which relates to the development of the Canadian National Railway. Thought should be given to the possibility of "bias" of the material presented. The teacher (or students, depending on development level) will prepare a chart/overhead of the following sub-headings:

- Pioneer Railroads 1832-1853
- Rail Building Boom 1854-1860
- Growing With Canada 1860-1960
- Westward Expansion 1900-1915
- Birth of Canadian National 1916-1929
- Setting the Pace 1923-1929
- Hard Times and Wartimes 1930-1945
- Post War Challenges 1946-1960
- Profits and Passengers 1960-1979
- The Drive to Compete 1980-1992
- Privatization and Prosperity 1992-1997
- North America's Railroad 1999 – Current

Ahead of time, draw a timeline on rolled out paper (giant school art paper rolls - use a light colour) that could be pinned across the back wall of the classroom. Every 50 cm on the line, mark and label one of the above date periods.

1. Divide the students into groups of two and assign a topic to each pair.

Instruct students to visit the CN website, and/or use related materials available in their school library to research their topics. Students are encouraged to work together or independently; however, they will be required to agree collaboratively on the important events of the time period.

2. Instruct students to make note of important events that took place in their particular time period that contributed to a change. For example, boom in immigration and settlement, stock market crash, wars, etc. They should have the opportunity to meet, discuss and agree on the more important issues/events.

3. Have the students type these events using large fonts, well spaced, on paper so they will be able to cut each event in a strip.

4. During the presentation of their findings to the class, each student will adhere the strip of paper to the large wall timeline after they have spoken about the issue/event.

5. Have a class discussion once all students have presented and the topics have been covered. During each time period, have students identify the factors that impacted a change or contributed to continuity over time. Ensure the discussions include considerations about whether the change can be classified as progress or decline. For example, a factor can contribute to a change in economic growth but at the same time, contribute to environmental decline.

6. Have the students complete the worksheet on the activity independently to demonstrate understanding of the process.

Evaluation:

The teacher may wish to use the attached worksheet as part of the assessment. An assessment rubric is also provided.

Extensions:

1. Have students explore the significance of “silk trains.”

2. Identify the qualities and/or changes the various presidents of the Canadian National Railway may have seen during the time each served as President of the company.

3. Compare the two major Pacific ports of British Columbia, Vancouver and Prince Rupert. Explain the role CN played in their development.

4. Explore the evolution of CN’s Logo

5. Explain the contribution CNR Radio played in Canada’s communication and media systems.

6. Find out more about the three-penny beaver stamp designed by Sir Sandford Fleming. Teachers may wish to direct students to the articles on Fleming and postage stamps in The Canadian Encyclopedia.

Required Materials:

Computer Lab time for student research. Approximately 5 metres of roll art paper

Resources

Marsh, James. “Railway History.” - The Canadian Encyclopedia

Tucker, Albert. “Canadian National Railways.” - The Canadian Encyclopedia

Canadian National Railway

CN Images of Canada Gallery

Francis, Daniel, Ed., Encyclopedia of British Columbia, Harbour Publishing, (2000).