Tracks of Change

Trace how one railroad connected events, people, and places.

6-12.HT1.6 "Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show what helped the railroad get built. Circle two effects it had on different groups, then draw arrows between details that are connected.

One Railroad, Many Changes

1. In 1862, as the Civil War divided the United States, Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act. The law offered railroad companies federal loans and large land grants to help build a line across the continent. Many Southern lawmakers, who had opposed northern routes, had left Congress when their states seceded. Their absence made approval easier. Federal leaders also wanted a stronger connection between the eastern states and the West. The Union Pacific built west from Omaha, and the Central Pacific built east from Sacramento. War did not stop this project. Instead, wartime politics helped set its course.

2. Building across mountains and plains took years of difficult labor. The Central Pacific hired thousands of Chinese workers, many of whom blasted tunnels through the Sierra Nevada. The Union Pacific employed many Irish immigrants, along with other workers. In May 1869, the two lines met at Promontory Summit, Utah. This link made trips and shipments between the eastern and western United States much faster than traveling by wagon. Farmers and businesses could reach distant buyers, while eastern factories could sell goods farther west. The railroad thus supported a growing national market, even though the people who built it faced dangerous work.

3. The same track also changed life for people already living in the West. Federal land grants covered areas that Native nations used or claimed, even when the government treated those places as available for development. Trains brought more settlers, soldiers, and supplies into the region. As settlement expanded, pressure on Native lands increased, and conflict grew. Some Native communities lost access to land and resources. The railroad was not the only cause of these changes, but it helped speed them up. By 1870, the line could look like an opportunity to a merchant and a threat to a Native family.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Civil War make approval of the railroad easier, and what larger goal did federal leaders hope it would serve?

2. How did immigration connect to the work of building the railroad across different regions?

3. How did the meeting of the two lines in 1869 help a national market grow?

4. How did federal land grants and train travel together increase pressure on Native nations?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write five sentences for a museum label called "Progress for Whom?" about the railroad as it stood in 1870. Connect its construction to a wider national change, then use two passage details to explain why two groups could judge its effects differently.

ANSWER KEY

Tracks of Change

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT1.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show what helped the railroad get built. Circle two effects it had on different groups, then draw arrows between details that are connected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Civil War make approval of the railroad easier, and what larger goal did federal leaders hope it would serve?	**Southern lawmakers who opposed northern routes had left Congress, making approval easier. Federal leaders wanted to connect the eastern states and the West more strongly.**
2	How did immigration connect to the work of building the railroad across different regions?	**The Central Pacific hired thousands of Chinese workers, many of whom blasted tunnels through the Sierra Nevada. The Union Pacific employed many Irish immigrants.**
3	How did the meeting of the two lines in 1869 help a national market grow?	**The completed link sped up travel and shipments, letting farmers and businesses reach distant buyers and eastern factories sell goods farther west.**
4	How did federal land grants and train travel together increase pressure on Native nations?	**Land grants covered areas Native nations used or claimed. Trains then brought more settlers, soldiers, and supplies into the region, increasing pressure on Native lands.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1870, the rail link showed how federal support helped the nation expand during and after the Civil War. Federal loans and land grants supported construction, and merchants gained faster access to distant buyers. A merchant might call the line progress because it opened new markets. A Native family might disagree because trains brought more settlers onto lands their nation used or claimed. The railroad strengthened a national market, but its benefits and costs were not shared equally.

Accept other supported connections between the railroad and the Civil War, immigration, the national market, or pressure on Native lands. For the museum label, look for a wider historical connection and distinct, passage-based effects on two groups.