

## From Stage to Rail: Comparing Travel Before and After the Transcontinental Railroad

#### By Aaron L. Crawford

#### **Summary**

Students will compare two primary accounts of overland travel in the 1860s – one by stagecoach, the other by railroad – to see how travel changed upon completion of the transcontinental railroad.

#### Main Curriculum Tie

U.S. I Standard 6.3: Students will identify the economic and geographic impact of the early Industrial Revolution's new inventions and transportation methods, such as...the transcontinental railroad...

#### **Additional Curriculum Ties**

U.S. I Standard 6.4: Students will make a case for the most significant cultural, political, and economic impacts of territorial and/or industrial expansion.

#### **Time Frame**

2 time periods that run 30 minutes each.

#### **Group Size**

This lesson is intended for whole-group instruction. Students reflect as individuals.

#### Life Skills

_ Aesthetics	_ Character	Communication	_ Employability
_ Social & Civio	Responsibility	X Systems Thinking	X Thinking & Reasoning

#### **Bibliography**

Lichatin, Rosanne. George Pullman: His Impact on the Railroad Industry, Labor, and American Life in the Nineteenth Century. n.d. 9 August 2018. <a href="https://www.gilderlehrman.org/content/george-pullman-his-impact-railroad-industry-labor-and-american-life-nineteenth-century">https://www.gilderlehrman.org/content/george-pullman-his-impact-railroad-industry-labor-and-american-life-nineteenth-century</a>.

Rusling, James Fowler. Across America: or, The Great West and the Pacific Coast. New York: Sheldon & Company, 1874. 7 August 2018. <a href="https://archive.org/details/acrossamericaorg00rusl">https://archive.org/details/acrossamericaorg00rusl</a>.

W.S. "Across the Continent. From the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean by Rail." New York Times 28 June 1869. 9 August 2018. <a href="http://cprr.org/Museum/Newspapers/New\_York\_Times/1869-06-28.html">http://cprr.org/Museum/Newspapers/New\_York\_Times/1869-06-28.html</a>.

#### **Materials**

A copy of the reflection paper and each of the primary documents for each student.

#### **Background for Teachers**

Before the first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, people traveled across the American West mainly by stagecoach. While railroads were available in the East, travel through the West was a slow, laborious process. The stagecoaches would travel nearly 24 hours a day, switching out horses at stations located every 10-15 miles. Passengers could only get out of the coach for meals. Passengers and crew had to sleep on or in the bumpy coach. There were

many different routes available (think of the distance from Texas to Montana), each taking a different amount of time to complete the journey. One commonality, though, is that the stages that carried the U.S. mail had to complete their journey in less than 25 days.

In contrast, the trek from Omaha to Sacramento took only four days to complete via the transcontinental railroad. Travel was cheaper and smoother. Railroads don't kick up dust like stagecoaches and were much less liable to break down. The Pullman Palace Car Company built luxurious cars for sleeping, dining, and relaxing. You may want to point out to your students that the Pullman cars were the equivalent of our first class airplane seating – the average person made the journey riding on economy class benches (\$64 a ticket for third class vs \$136 for a sleeping car. Adjusted for inflation, that's \$1,279 for economy and \$2,677 for first class).

Gen. Rusling talks about the food they ate. A "saleratus biscuit" is a biscuit made with sodium bicarbonate (generally known as baking soda now). They are very similar to modern biscuits, except that modern students tend to enjoy them fresh while the stagecoach riders would not have had that luxury.

You may want to give students an idea of the distances involved. To do so, you could show them this map: <a href="https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/national">https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/national</a> <a href="parks/cpup95.jpg">parks/cpup95.jpg</a>

#### Student Prior Knowledge

Students must know what a stagecoach is and that they were used to cross the Western United States. They should also be generally familiar with the cultural and economic importance of the transcontinental railroad.

#### **Intended Learning Outcomes**

Students will contrast a journey across America completed via stagecoach with one completed via the transcontinental railroad. They will get a sense of the impact the transcontinental railroad had on travel.

#### Instructional Procedures

- Hand out the student reflection guide and the James F. Rusling/stagecoach document. I recommend reading the
  questions first. You can have the students read individually, as a whole group, or in small groups depending on the
  ability of your students.
- 2. Have the students answer the first group of questions.
- 3. Hold a brief discussion on what they learned What was it like to travel by stagecoach?
- 4. Hand out the second document by "W.S." on the transcontinental railroad. Again, I recommend reading the questions first.
- After reading this document, have students answer the second group of questions.
- 6. In a class discussion, reflect on how travel changed. What was it like to travel by rail? How was it different than traveling by stagecoach?

#### **Strategies for Diverse Learners**

The primary documents contain a few complicated words and complex, dated sentence structure. You may want to read it with your struggling students, either in a small group or as a class, and talk about these words. I also recommend pausing to discuss and visualize what the journey would have been like.

#### **Extensions**

There are a number of good websites available on both stagecoach and train travel. Interested students could conduct more research on the routes and the people who traveled them. Another activity would be to provide the students with a map. Have them map the locations while they read, to trace some of the places each route visited.

#### **Assessment Plan**

The student reflection paper will serve as the primary assessment tool.

# Stagecoach to Railroad: A Comparison Name:

## Across America: or, The Great West and the Pacific Coast by Gen. James F. Rusling

1.	List at least five things you learned about travelling by stagecoach.
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	•
	•
	•
2.	Why was travel by stagecoach difficult?
3.	What aspect of stagecoach travel would have been the most difficult for you? <i>Why?</i>

## "Across the Continent. From the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean by Rail" by W.S.

4.	List five things you learned about travel by rail.  •
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	•
	•
	•
5.	How was travel by rail different than travel by stagecoach?
6.	Think about how the railroad would have changed people's lives. How would easier, faster, cheaper travel have impacted people in the 1860s? Defend your answer.

### Excerpts from *Across America: or, The Great West and the Pacific Coast,* by Gen. James F. Rusling (1874)

#### **Background:**

Brigadier-General James F. Rusling received orders to inspect the military outposts in the Western United States in 1866. The goal was to reduce the costs of outfitting military units in the West. General Rusling wrote a detailed account of his journey, in which he "cross[ed] the continent to San Francisco, among the Mountains, along the Pacific Coast, and thence home by the Isthmus, I travelled in all over 15,000 miles, as per accompanying Map; of which about 2,000 were by railroad, 2,000 by stage-coach, 3,000 by ambulance or on horseback, and the remainder by steamer." Several years later, he used his journals and recollections to write a book. These are some excerpts from that book.

#### **Document:**

- p. 21-22 ACROSS America, from New York to San Francisco, may be roughly estimated as three thousand miles. The first third of this occupied us only about three days and three nights, though the whole trip consumed just less than a twelve-month. From New York to St. Louis, *via* Cincinnati, was our first stage, and of course by rail-road. We left New York, Tuesday, July 24, 1866, by the Erie Railway, and on the following Thursday after-noon reached St. Louis...we reached [Fort] Riley [Kansas] by stage-coach. The coach itself was a lumbering weather-beaten vehicle, with sorry teams of horses; it was a hot August afternoon, with rolling clouds of dust; we had nine passengers inside and three outside, with freight and baggage everywhere; and altogether this little stage-ride was a good initiation into the mysteries and miseries of stage-coaching across the continent...
- p. 41-42 We found his stages to be our well-known Concord coaches, and they quite surpassed our expectations, both as to comfort and to speed. They were intended for nine inside three seats full and as many more out-side, as could be induced to get on. Their teams were either four or six horses, depending on the roads, and the distance between stations... These "stations" varied from ten to twelve miles apart, depending on water and grass, and consisted of the rudest kind of a shanty or sod-house ordinarily. Here we would find another team, ready harnessed, prancing to be gone, and in fifteen minutes or so would be off on the road again. Halts were made twice a day for meals, forty minutes each, and with this exception we kept howling ahead night and day. Our meals were fair for the region; generally coffee, beef-steak or bacon, potatoes, and saleratus-biscuit hot; but the prices one dollar and one dollar and a half per meal seemed extortionate. In this way, we often made ten and twelve miles per hour, while on the road; and seldom drove less than one hundred, and one hundred and twenty-five miles, per day and night...
- p. 44 As to the weather, we found that intensely hot in the middle of the day (it being the last of August and first of September), but the mornings and evenings were delightful, and the nights always superb. Most of the passengers preferred the inside; but Dr. M. and I chose the outside, which with some inconveniences had its advantages after all. By day it gave us a wider view of the country; and at night we used to give our blankets a "shake down" on the flat top (first borrowing an armful of hay from some station), and then go luxuriously to sleep. At first when we tried this, not understanding the philosophy of the situation, we came near rolling off when the coach would pitch into a chuck-hole, or give a lurch from heel to port; but we soon learned to boom ourselves on, with a rope or strap from railing to railing, and thus managed to secure not a little of "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," while our fellow-passengers down below (nine inside), packed like sardines in a box, got seldom a wink...
- p. 143 Finally, Oct. 4th, we closed up our duties at Denver, and started for Salt Lake. The stage left at 8 p. m., and after much hearty hand-shaking and kindly good-byes, we were at last off for the Pacific. For the first time we fully realized, that we had definitely cut loose from the Atlantic States, and had a long and toilsome trip now before us. I remember a feeling of sadness, as this conviction came sharply upon me; but we were soon whirling across the Platte, and off for Laporte. The fare through to Salt Lake, some 600 miles, with 25 pounds of baggage, was \$150, currency; meals extra, at \$1,00 and \$1,50 each. Our coach, "Red Rupert," was a mountain mud-wagon, with a low canvas top, so as to be less liable to capsize in crossing the range, than a regular Concord Coach, and was intended for ten passengers nine inside and one outside. As we had only half that number of passengers, however, we thought we would get along very comfortably. We had gamey, spirited horses, that carried us along quite rapidly, until near midnight, when we stuck fast in a mudhole, and all hands were ordered up to help shift baggage and lift the coach out...
- p. 154-155 We reached Fort Bridger late at night (Oct. 8th), and found ourselves pretty well jaded, both in body and mind. We had been four days and nights continuously on the road since leaving Denver, and in that time had made four hundred and eighty miles. This was the hardest ride by stage-coach we had had yet, and altogether was a pretty fair test of one's power of endurance. We became so accustomed to the coach, that we could fall asleep almost any time; but slumber in a stage-coach, or rather "mountain mud-wagon," is only a poor apology for "tired nature's sweet restorer," after all. The first night out, there being but five of us, four each "pre-empted" a corner, while the fifth man "camped down" on the middle seat. Along about 11 p. m. we struck a piece of extra good road, the conversation gradually wound up, each

settled back into his great-coat and robe, and presently we were all fairly off into dreamland. A half hour or so rolls by, when bump goes the coach against an obstinate rock, or chuck into a malicious mud-hole; your neighbor's head comes bucking against you, or you go bucking mildly against him; the man on the middle seat rolls off and wakes up, with a growl or objurgation, that seems half excusable; your friends on the front seat get their legs tangled and twisted up with yours, or you get yours twisted and tangled up with theirs — you don't exactly know which; and, in short, everybody wakes up chaotic and confused, not to say dismal and cross. Of course you try it again after a while, you wrap your robes still better about you, you adjust your legs more carefully than before, and settling down again into your corner, think now you will surely get a good sleep. However, you hardly get to nodding fairly, before there comes a repetition of your former dismal experiences, and so the night wears on like a hideous dream. A series of unusual jolts and bumps disgusts every one with even the attempt to sleep, and presently all hands drift into a general talk or smoke. The history of one night is the wretched history of all — only each successive one, as you advance, becomes "a little more so." Long before reaching Fort Bridger, we were in a sort of a half-comatose condition, with every bone aching, and every inch of flesh sore, and with the romance of stage-coaching gone from us forever. Now, if a man's body were made of india-rubber, or his arms and legs were telescopic, so as to lengthen out and shorten up, perhaps such continuous travelling would not be so bad. But, as it is, I confess, it was a great weariness to the flesh, and looking back on it now, with the Pacific Railroad completed — its express trains and palace-cars in motion — I don't really see how poor human nature managed to endure it. Conversation is a good thing per se, but most men converse themselves out in a day or two. So, a good joke or a popular song helps to fill the hiatus somewhat, and accordingly we buried "John Brown," and "Rallied round the flag," and "Marched through Georgia," day after day, until they got to be a "bore," even to the most severely patriotic among us...

p. 220-221 We left Bear River about 10 p. m., in an ugly storm of rain and sleet, well tucked in for a night's ride; but in an hour or so were roused up by the stage coming to a dead-halt, and the driver singing out — it sounded half-maliciously – "Good place to walk, gents! Bad place ahead!" Out we got for a dismal walk of a mile or more, through a soft and yielding bottom, where the horses could hardly pull the empty coach through, and then in again with muddy boots and disgusted feelings generally. Just before daybreak, we struck a long and steep "divide," where the sleet had thickened into snow, without stiffening the ground enough to bear the coach up, and here again we had another cheerful walk of a couple of miles or so, to relieve the blown horses. At King Hill, the last serious "divide" before reaching Boise, we had another promenade of a mile or two, through five or six inches of snow, just after midnight; but I managed to stick by the stage. The weather continued raw and cold, rainy and sleety, by turns, and we found it necessary to keep well wrapped up, except in the middle of the day. At night our mattresses proved too narrow for three, after all, and Halsey's shoulders or knees were constantly punching into either L. or me. He and L. usually slept right along all night, but I got scarcely a genteel wink from Bear River to Boise. By sunrise ordinarily we were up, and then came a general smoke and talk over the night's experience. By nine or ten a.m. we halted for breakfast, which usually consisted of chicory coffee, stringy beef or bacon, and saleratus-biscuit. Sometimes we got fried potatoes in addition — which helped the meal out somewhat but not often. Late at night we stopped for dinner (only two meals a day), which was generally only a poor edition of breakfast over again, with the courses perchance reversed. Bilious and anguish [ready to vomit] with that accursed mountain-fever still hanging about me, I need scarcely say, I had little relish for such a bill of fare, and indeed scarcely ate a " square meal " from Bear River to Boise... We were three days and three nights on the road continuously, never stopping except forty minutes or so at a time for meals. The last twenty-four hours out, the weather was raw and cold even for November; and as we rolled into Boise, with every joint aching, the lights of a town never seemed more winning and welcome...

p. 247-248 Good-bye, mustangs and donkeys! Good-bye, stage-coaches and ambulances! Two thousand four hundred miles of their drag and shake, of their rattle and bang, across the Plains and over the Mountains, had given us our fill of them. We had had runaways, we had had break-downs, and about every stage experience, except a genuine upset, and how we happened to escape that will always remain a mystery. Our romance of stage-coaching, I must say, was long since gone. There before us now lay the lordly Columbia, with visions of steamboats and locomotives. And looking back on our long jaunt, with all its discomforts and dangers, it seemed tor the moment as if nothing could induce us to take it again. Hereafter, we felt assured, we should appreciate the comfort and speed of eastern travel more, and pray for the hastening of all our Pacific Railroads...

### Excerpts from "Across the Continent. From the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean by Rail" by W.S. (*New York Times*, 1869)

#### **Background:**

George Mortimer Pullman is best known for the company he founded: the Pullman Company, which manufactured various kinds of train cars. Many of these were designed to maximize the luxury of the train traveler by offering things like sleeping and dining. While Pullman began manufacturing his cars by 1863, their popularity skyrocketed after President Lincoln's body was transported aboard a Pullman sleeper. The model name of these sleeper cars was "Palace." The purpose of Pullman's part in this expedition was to convince the railroad executives to add Pullman cars to every transcontinental train. He was successful in this endeavor.

The author, who lists Pullman as one of his traveling companions on this 1869 journey, is listed at the end of the article as W.S. and identified only as "Our Own Correspondent." He states that the journey from Omaha to San Francisco took 100 hours (4.16 days). The full article was originally published in the New York Times on 28 June 1869.

You will see the phrase "persicos apparatus." That phrase is from a Latin poem by Horace called "Persicos Odi." Most students in the 1800s learned Latin. In the process, almost all of them were required to translate this poem into English. The phrase "Persicos Odi" literally translates to "Persian pomp," referencing something unnecessarily fancy.

#### **Document:**

My trip over the Pacific Railroad, from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean, from Omaha to San Francisco, though presenting no very extraordinary experiences, was made under some new conditions of travel; and it was altogether so delightful a trip, and so fruitful in ministrations to the eye and the imagination, that it may be written out at somewhat greater length than could be wished. Still, as it is manifest that this jaunt is destined, when its varied attractions become known, to be the most popular of all pleasure-rides. . .

We are at Omaha. By whatever route one comes from the East, one lands there, that being the eastern terminus of the Pacific Railroad.

The time-table of the Union Pacific road is so arranged as to make a close connection with the two great lines from the East — the Chicago and Northwest, and the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Roads. This time is 4:20 P. M. if you chose, however, you may lie over a day or two at Omaha and spend the time pleasantly and profitably viewing the town. . . Accordingly, at 4:20 P. M., Sunday, we rolled out of the station at Omaha and started westward on our long jaunt.

Behind our locomotive are a couple of baggage cars, then three for passengers, lastly the two Pullman cars — the dining and sleeping palaces, the latter in rear. We have 140 passengers on board, all told. We are seated in the sleeping car, which well merits the name of "Palace," only that there is no inhabitant of a palace, no Prince, Monarch or Czar on earth who rides so royally or with such persicos apparatus of [unnecessarily fancy] comfort, luxury and splendor. . .

A couple of hours out, dinner was announced — an "event" to those of us who had yet to experience what it is to eat in one of Pullman's hotels on wheels; so stepping into the car next forward of our sleeping palace, we found ourselves in the dining car, the "International." which, O, muse of gastronomy, inspire me with language fitly to describe! And first as to the mechanism, &c, of the car itself. The "International" is about sixty feet long by ten feet wide, and is supported on eightwheeled trucks, giving sixteen wheels to the car. This arrangement, and an elaborate combination of steel springs, secures such steadiness that no serious jolting unsettles a dish. The body of the vehicle is of wondrous strength, its exterior marvelous fine, while its use is indicated to the outside view by its decorations in carvings and paintings representing fish, fruits, game, &c. This car is devoted exclusively to the purposes of cooking and dining. Midway between the two ends of the car, and occupying its entire width save a narrow passage to the left, is located a compact kitchen, specially designed for the Pullman car, and a marvel of economy of space and of adaptation of means to ends it is.

I am not learned in the mysteries of the batterie de cuisine, but I have it from an expert that it affords facilities for the last triumphs of cookery, and as the proof of the pudding is the eating thereof, I can bear personal witness to the amazing success realized in the adytum of gastronomy [the adytum was the innermost part of a Greek temple; gastronomy means it relates to digestion].

Now, you may imagine that the presence of a kitchens in the dining car is sacrifice of aesthetics to necessity; but such is not the case, for the apartment is so effectually encased in rich mirrors and carved decorations that you would not dream it to be a kitchen, while the ventilation is so perfect that not the faintest intimation that cooking is going on reaches the nostrils. Immediately beneath the kitchen floor, and communicating by trap doors, are dust-proof ice-boxes and provision cellar, in which are packed the fresh meats and the butter, eggs, and other edibles requiring cool quarters.

Having inspected the cuisine, we come to the dining-saloons, which occupy the two ends of the car. In each of these are placed six tables, making twelve in all; and as at each table four can sit comfortably, forty-eight persons may dine at the same time. These tables are portable, and may be promptly stowed away out of sight. Attached to the side of the car, be each table, is a bell, one stroke upon which instantly brings a waiter to your side. The interior of the dining-saloon is elegantly finished in black walnut, mounted with silver, while all the appointments are in perfect taste, and the effect is strikingly pleasing.

It was a revelation to us, that first dinner on Sunday; and though we continued to dine for four days, and had as many breakfasts and suppers, our whole party never ceased to admire the perfection of the arrangements and the marvelous results achieved. Upon tables covered with snowy linen and garnished with services of solid silver, Ethiopian waiters, flitting about in spotless white, placed as by magic a repast at which DELMONICO himself could have had no occasion to blush; and indeed in some respects it would be hard for that distinguished chef to match our menu; for, in addition to all that ordinarily makes up a first-chop dinner, had we not antelope steak, (the gourmet who has not experienced this — bah! what does he know of the feast of fat things?) our delicious mountain brook-trout, our choice fruits and berries, and, sauce piquante and unpurchaseable, our sweet-scented appetite-compelling air of the prairies? You may depend upon it, we all did justice to the good things; and, as we washed them down with bumpers of sparking Krug, while we sped along at the rate of thirty miles an hour, agreed it was the fastest living we had ever experienced. . .

For ourselves, we were at the time engaged in the agreeable occupation of breakfasting in our palace dining car, and a charming reunion we had. Having already come 300 miles on the Pacific Road, and dined and slept in the train, we had by this time a tolerably fair notion of what the whole ride was to be. I wish I could describe to you the consciousness of grateful surprise with which we now begin to realize that, instead of the experience of the dangers, hardships and discomforts of which we had read as incident to crossing the continent by rail, we were going to have a really charming jaunt. . .

As we have passed over the whole of the Union Pacific Railroad, this might be the proper place to enter into some reflections on the character of the road, as a road. But I have really little to say that has not already appeared in the course of this letter. Yet this may be added. For near a thousand miles it is as good as could possibly be desired. The last hundred or hundred and fifty miles we passed over when we were asleep; but when we compared notes in the morning, we could not discover that this part of the track had been rough enough to disturb in the least our slumbers. . .

lo! we were in the rich valley of the Sacramento — in California, in El Dorado! It was sunset of Thursday when we reached the City of Sacramento, and here we remained over night. At 6 o'clock Friday morning we took the railroad to Vallejo, and thence by steamer twenty miles to San Francisco, where we arrived at 11 A.M. — one hundred [hours] from Omaha.

Some of us had not been very well on starting; the ladies, indeed, were all feeling poorly. They and all of us at the end of our journey found ourselves not only wholly free from fatigue, but completely rehabilitated in body and spirits. Were we very far from wrong if we voted the Pacific Railroad a success?









Lesson plans on the Transcontinental Railroad created with the support of Spike150, the Utah Division of State History, and Utah Council for the Social Studies.