

## Growth and Expansion of America Classroom Activity

The Classroom Activity introduces students to the context of a performance task, so they are not disadvantaged in demonstrating the skills the task intends to assess. Contextual elements include: an understanding of the setting or situation in which the task is placed, potentially unfamiliar concepts that are associated with the scenario, and **key terms** or vocabulary students will need to understand in order to meaningfully engage with and complete the performance task. The Classroom Activity is also intended to generate student interest in further exploration of the key idea(s). The Classroom Activity should be easy to implement with clear instructions.

Please read through the entire Classroom Activity before beginning the activity with students to ensure any classroom preparation can be completed in advance.

Throughout the activity it is permissible to pause and ask students if they have any questions.

### Resources Needed:

- Chart paper, projector, whiteboard, or a chalkboard
- Markers or chalk
- One piece of paper and pencil for each student (Students who need an accommodation may use their preferred tool for writing.)
- Some method of displaying ancillary materials<sup>1</sup>

### Learning Goal:

- Students will understand the context of the key concepts related to the topic:
  - Transportation was much slower in the 1800s and early 1900s than it is today.
  - The United States expanded rapidly in the 1800s.

## Growth and Expansion of America Classroom Activity

[Purpose: The facilitator’s goal is to help students understand that the United States expanded rapidly during the 1800s and early 1900s and that this growth happened when travel was much more difficult than it is today.]

[Place the students in small groups\* of three or four students. Distribute scrap paper and a pencil to each student. When done, write the following question on the board: “What are the different ways people travel today?”]

[\*Note: The following section can be modified to accommodate various teacher-student interaction types such as a teacher-led discussion with the entire class, teacher-student discussion for remote locations with a single student, or small groups.]

**Facilitator says:** “During the 1800s and early 1900s, the United States expanded rapidly. Today, we are going to do a Write-Pair-Share activity to explore a couple of questions related to the expansion of the United States. You will work independently first, then share with your group, and finally discuss as a class. Each of you have received a piece of paper and a pencil. Take one minute to write your answers independently to the following question: ‘What are the different ways people travel today?’ You will share your answers with a group when you finish.”

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<sup>1</sup> Facilitators can decide whether they want to display ancillary materials using an overhead projector or computer/Smartboard, or whether they want to produce them as a handout for students.

[After about one minute, have students share their answers with their group. Then, after one minute of group sharing, have some students take turns writing their ideas on the board under the initial question. This discussion should last about three minutes.]

**Possible class discussion answers (unscripted):**

- Buses
- Cars
- Planes
- Trains
- Walking
- Boats

[Write the following question on the board: “How do you think travel was different in the United States 150 years ago?”]

**Facilitator says:** “Take one minute to answer the following question independently: ‘How do you think travel was different in the United States 150 years ago?’ Again, you will share your answers with your group when you finish. After that, we will discuss your responses as a class.”

[After about one minute, have students share their ideas with their group. After one minute of group sharing, ask some students to share their responses to the question and record those answers under the second question on the board. If the answers in the list below aren’t mentioned, discuss them and add them to the list on the board. This discussion should last about three minutes.]

**Possible class discussion answers (unscripted):**

- People walked a lot more.
- There were no cars, so many people rode horses, or used horses to pull wagons.
- Trains were just beginning to change the way people traveled.
- Travel was much slower than it is today.

**Facilitator says:** “Take two minutes with your group to answer the following question: ‘How would traveling like people did in the 1800s affect your daily life?’”

[After about two minutes, have students meet as a class to share their ideas. Ask the groups to share their responses to the question and record those answers under the third question on the board. If the answers in the list below aren’t mentioned, discuss them and add them to the list on the board. This discussion should last about three minutes.]

**Possible class discussion answers (unscripted):**

- Regular activities like getting food would be much more difficult.
- Everyone would work and go to school closer to home.
- Long trips would take much more time.
- Fewer people would move long distances because of the difficulty of travel.
- News wouldn’t spread as quickly or maybe not at all.

[Display **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** from the Ancillary Materials. (Note: For students who are visually impaired, read the picture description beneath each image.)]

**Facilitator says:** “The United States has changed a lot since the country was founded in 1776. Based on the maps, in what ways has the country changed? Take two minutes to discuss this with your group.”

[After about two minutes, have students meet as a class to share their ideas. Ask the students to share their responses to the question and record those answers under that question on the board. If

the answers in the list below aren't mentioned, discuss them and add them to the list on the board. This discussion should last about three minutes.]

**Possible class discussion answers (unscripted):**

- | <b>Possible student responses:</b> | <b>Teacher clarifies:</b>   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| • It got bigger, more states       | From 13 states to 50  |
| • Bigger size, more land           | From 360,000 square miles to over 3.7 million square miles (10x the size) |
| • More people                      | From 4 million people (in 1790) to over 300 million people                |

[Write the following on the board: "Transcontinental Railroad" and "Western Pioneers."]

**Facilitator says:** "So, based on these two maps, we can come to the basic understanding that from the 1800s to the early 1900s, the United States grew massively in number of states, boundary, and population. In the late 1800s there was a big push to create a transcontinental railroad that spanned America from the east to the west coast. I want you to do a Think-Pair-Share to answer this question: 'Why do you think there was a push for the development of a transcontinental railroad? And, how do you think the development of railroads across America related to the growth of the United States?' Take one minute to form an answer independently. Then you will share with your group."

[After about one minute, have students discuss their answers to the question with their group. Then, after one minute of group discussion, meet as a class to share their ideas. Ask some students to share their responses to the question. This discussion should last about three minutes.]

**Possible student responses:**

- People were wanting to move west.
- Railroads made travel across the country easier and faster.
- More people moved from place to place.
- Trains could transport goods across the country.

**Facilitator says:** “Now I have two final questions for you to think about and discuss with your group. ‘Why was there a push for a transcontinental railroad?’ and ‘What does the expansion across the continent during the 1800s tell you about Americans at that time?’ Meet with your group and take one minute to discuss your ideas on these two questions.”

[After one minute, have some groups share their ideas about the question to the class.]

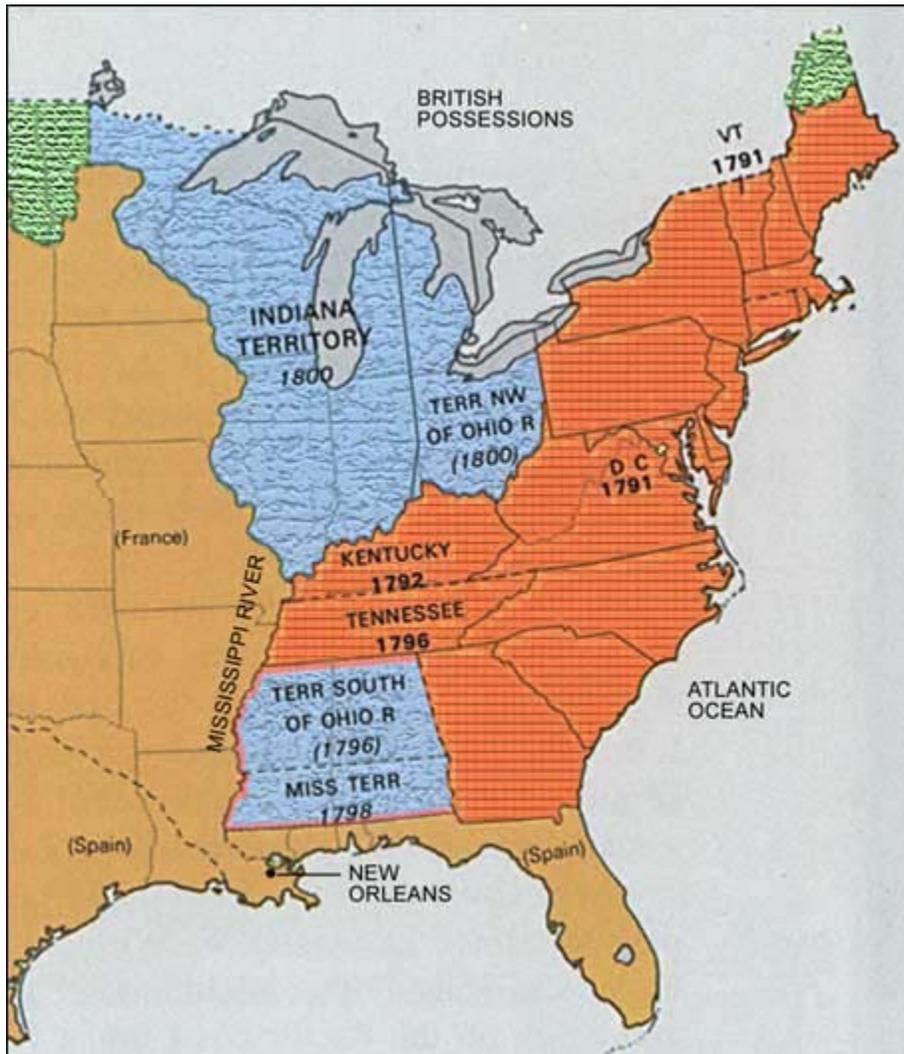
**Possible class discussion answers (*unscripted*):** [Give the following answers when class discussion ends.]

- The building of the Transcontinental Railroad played a large role in the expansion of the United States because it enabled people to travel and ship goods much more easily across the country.
- Since Americans in the late 1800s felt they were destined to settle the rest of the continent, many people felt a sense of adventure and purpose when they decided to travel west and settle.

**Facilitator says:** “You will learn more about the growth and expansion of America in the performance task you will be completing. Remember that the United States expanded rapidly during the 1800s and early 1900s, and all that growth happened when it was much more difficult to travel than it is today. You are now ready to complete your performance task. Please, leave your recorded notes and pencils behind to be collected.”

Ancillary Materials

Figure 1



Picture Description: This image shows a map of the United States in 1800. In 1800 the states that were part of America were those east of the Mississippi River. At this time the states that are now located near the Great Lakes were called territories. The area near the Gulf of Mexico was also a territory. All of the land west of the Mississippi River was being explored but was not yet a part of America.

Image from the National Park Service. In the public domain.

Ancillary Materials

Figure 2



Picture Description: Figure two shows a map of the United States as it is known today. All 50 states are outlined and labeled with their abbreviations.

Image from the United States Department of Agriculture. In the public domain.