

Travelling on a steam train

Travelling on a steam train was different from travelling on trains today. See if you can spot the differences.

You are stood on the platform and are looking out of the station along the railway track. In the distance you can see a cloud of smoke and hear the clanking of the steam locomotive. As the minutes tick by on the station clock, the train comes closer and closer then rushes past you along the platform. The noise is deafening and the hot steam and smoke swirls around the station and makes you cough.

The carriages clatter by you, then, as the locomotive brakes make a high pitched scream the carriages shudder to a halt. A porter takes your case and puts it on the roof of the carriage. You climb in through one of the many doors on the side of the carriage and find yourself in a small compartment. There are two benches in the compartment. One faces the front of the train and the other faces the back. Each bench can hold about six people. There is just a space between the benches where people walk before they sit down. There are no tables and no access to a toilet. At the other side of the compartment is another door. This is used when the train stops at a station with the platform on that side. Each carriage has a number of compartments like this one but you cannot move between them.

A porter shuts the carriage doors with a bang and the guard blows his whistle. The locomotive pushes out huge amounts of steam with a roar and the train starts to move. The locomotive puffs out more steam and makes a loud “chuff, chuff, chuff” sound.

The train increases its speed and travels through the countryside. It moves through cuttings and travels along embankments and over bridges. Smoke from the locomotive blows over the carriage. Some hot soot lands on your case and burns a small hole in it.

After an hour you reach your destination. The train will travel on but stops at the station for a quarter of an hour to allow the passengers to go to the toilets on the station and buy food for the next part of their journey.

1. How are locomotives today different from steam locomotives?



2. How is luggage stored differently today?



3. How are carriages different today?



4. What other differences are there between travelling on a train in Victorian times and travelling today?



5. Are there any similarities in the way we travel on trains today? Explain your answer.



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Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheet. Resources about locomotives and trains today.

There may be a steam railway near you that the class could visit.

Using the worksheet

Tell the children that before the development of the railway, people had to walk, ride on horseback or travel in a stage coach or a wagon. All these forms of transport were slow compared to railway travel. When the railway arrived it proved very popular and allowed people to travel faster and further than they had ever done before. If you have been studying the class system in Victorian times you may say that there were first, second, third and even fourth class tickets. If you looked as if you had a ticket above your class you were not allowed on the train.



Younger students

Let the students read through the passage and answer the questions. You may like to use the questions for a class discussion and the students can write down their answers afterwards. You may like to set up twelve chairs as if they were the benches in the compartment and let the students sit on them. The students could sit there for a few minutes and imagine what it would be like to travel in a compartment. This could be made even more realistic if the students were in costume for a Victorian day.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Extract information from a text.
- Make comparisons about life in the past with life today.

Older students

Let the students read through the passage and answer the questions. They could also use sources to find out how a steam engine worked to pull the train.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Extract information from a text.
- Make comparisons about life in the past with life today.
- Use a range of sources to investigate a topic.