

## TEACHING IDEAS FOR

# CANADIAN RAILROAD TRILOGY

*Canadian Railroad Trilogy* offers a treasury of possibilities for classroom study, at any grade level. Teachers can incorporate the book in a variety of subject areas: Language Arts, Visual Arts, Music, Social Studies, Drama and Science and Technology.

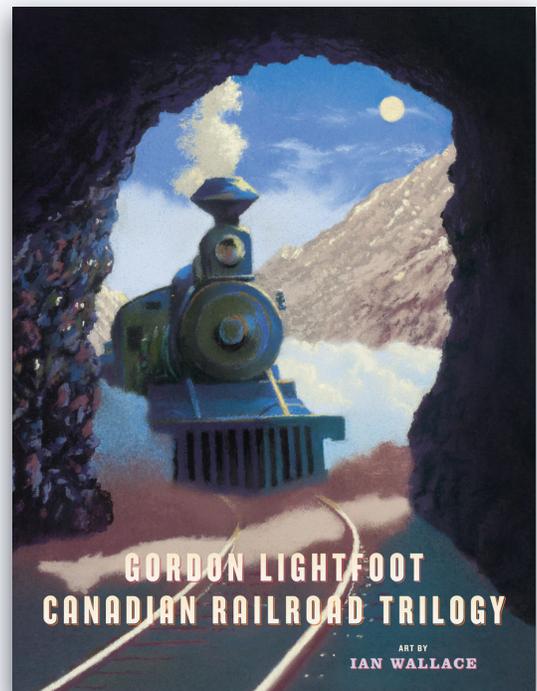
This set of teaching ideas offers suggestions for before, during and after reading. The activities for after reading are sorted by grade level, but teachers should skim all of them for ideas they can adapt for their class.

These teaching ideas can also be used by families reading the book together at home.

When reading the book, remember that even older students like to be read to, but teachers can choose a method that suits their class best. Teachers should be sure to have students listen to a recording of the song. Here are some ideas:



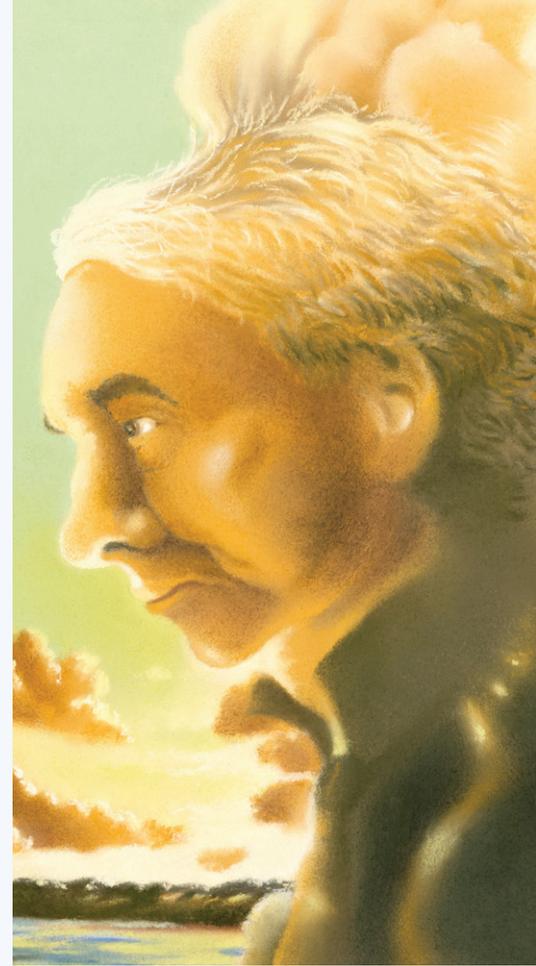
- » first play a recording of the song and then read the book aloud or vice versa
- » read the book aloud, stopping to read Ian Wallace's note at the back of the book for each illustration
- » in a second reading, stop to ask questions (see "Discussion Questions")
- » invite students to read the book on their own or with a partner or small group
- » have a recording and headphones available for students to listen to and read on their own



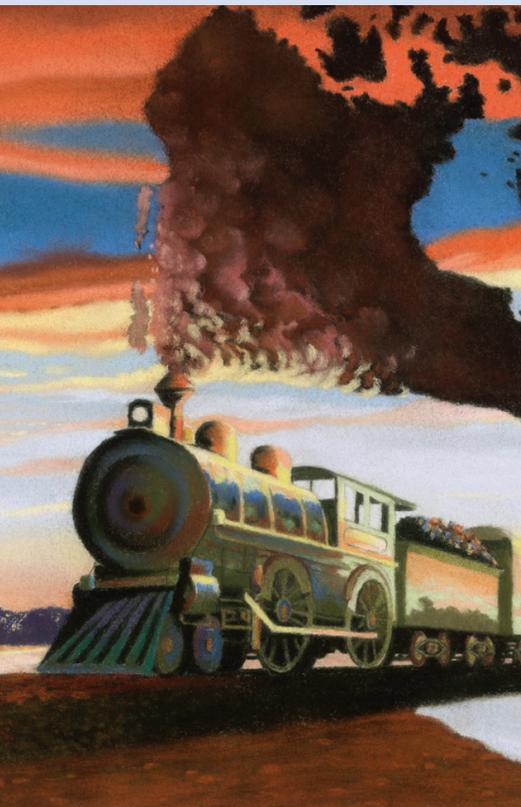
## Before Reading

*For younger students (ages 4 - 8)*

- » Have students talk about trains; for example — what they look like outside and inside (compare modern trains to trains pulled by steam engines), what they sound like, how they move, what they are made of, how fast they go, how they get across rivers and mountains, what the tracks look like, how the tracks are built and different types of trains and their purposes.
- » Ask students to talk about a time they have been on a train.



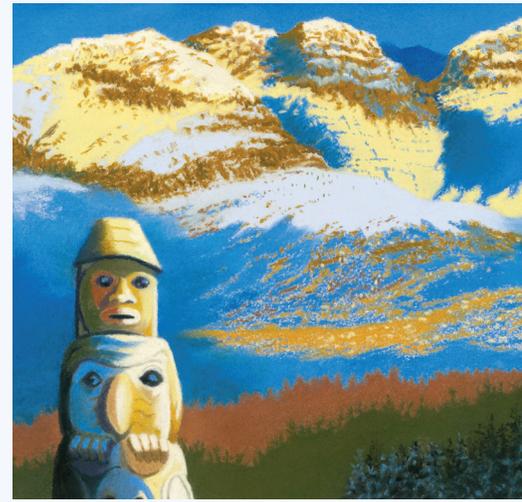
*For all ages*



- » Ask students to tell stories they have read about trains or describe TV shows they have seen about trains.
- » Introduce the book by showing the cover and the sheet music (at the back of the book) and explain that the book is a song that has been put into book form, with pictures for every line of the song — 27 pictures in all, including the cover. Tell students what the book is about, or you could have them make predictions and then find out more as you read.
- » Point out the information on the back cover flap and tell students about Gordon Lightfoot and Ian Wallace.
- » Ask students what they know about life in Canada in the late 1800s.

## Discussion Questions

- » *What do these lines of the song tell you?*
- » *What words come to mind when you read and view this page?*
- » *What is happening on this page?*
- » *What details tell you that this song is about long ago?*
- » *How does this page make you feel?*
- » *How does the art on this page match what the words say?*
- » *Why do you think the artist chose this scene (or these colors, or this perspective) for this part of the song?*
- » *What do you think the people on this page are doing? How do you think they are feeling?*
- » *Imagine you are in this picture. Where are you? What do you see? What are you doing? Are you cold or warm? Is it night or day? How do you feel?*
- » *What word(s) do you like in these lines of the song? What do you like about it (them)? How do they help you understand the song?*
- » *What words on this page help you paint a picture in your mind of what is being described?*
- » *What has the artist achieved on this page that you really admire?*
- » *Why did people want to build the railroad?*

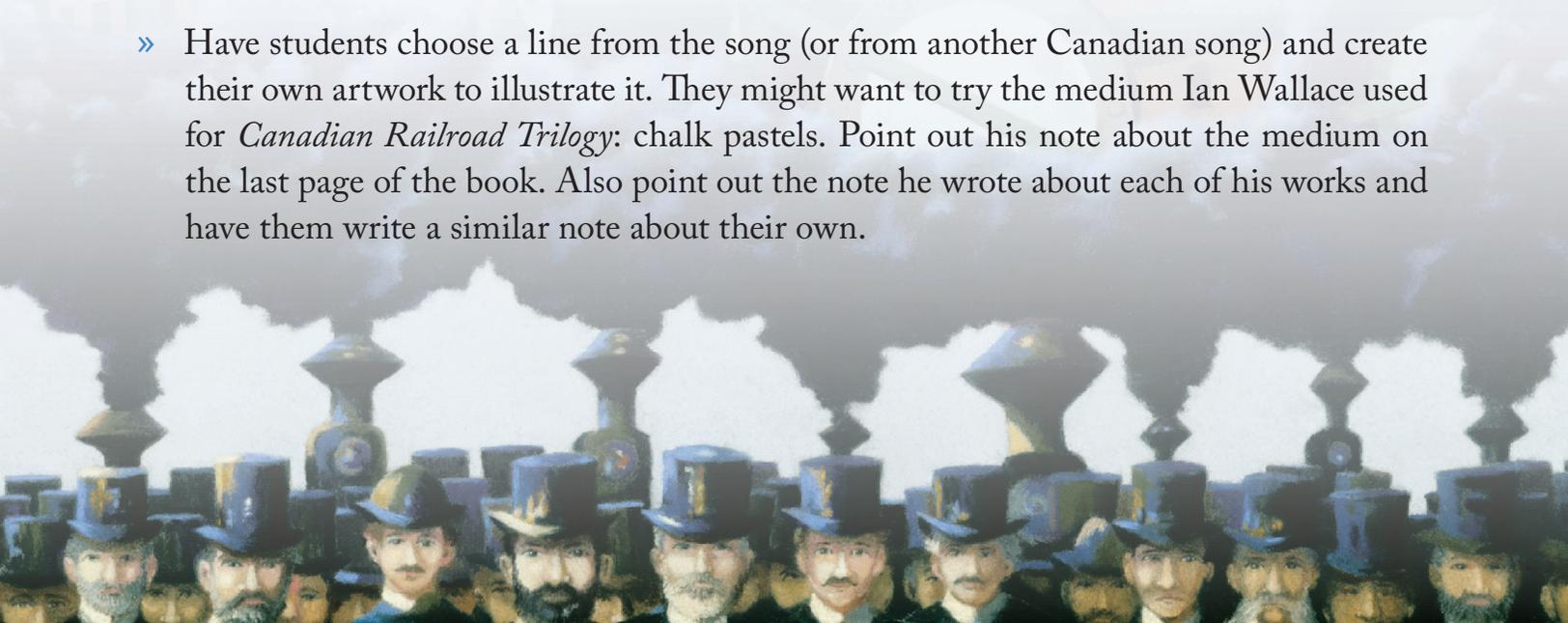


- » *How would the building of the railroad help people? How would it be a problem for people?*
- » *How might the railroad have affected the First Nations and Métis people who lived on that land? How might they have felt?*
- » *How does the book's ending echo its beginning?*
- » *What did the railroad symbolize for people at that time?*
- » *What feeling are you left with at the end of the book?*
- » *What is your favorite page or spread?*

## Activity Ideas for Grades K–6

- » Make a “Word Wall” of vocabulary from the book. Have students sort the words into groups; for example, the building of the railway (track, bridges, railroad, hammers, navvies, etc.) and the geography (muskeg, prairie, plains, mountains, etc.).
- » Ask students to draw or paint a picture of a train passing through their community.
- » Have the class perform the song; some lines could be sung solo, some by two or three voices and some spoken. They could use a variety of musical instruments, sound effects and movement.
- » Talk with students about what workers had to do to build the railroad (clear the land, carry equipment, blast through rock, hammer down the tracks, build bridges). Reread the relevant pages. Then, as you describe the different types of work, have students act them out. Talk with students about how hard the work was, who the workers were and what their living conditions were like.
- » Have the class plan and present a dramatic reading of the song: They could enact the song while playing a recording; present tableaux and readings of selected spreads; or give a choral reading.
- » Provide a large map of Canada and have students draw the railway on it and mark and illustrate important events along its route, as well as the geographical features of the regions. Alternatively, have them make a railroad track to post on the classroom walls as a timeline, with the important events marked and illustrated.
- » Have students make one train car each, and then join the cars together to make one train. Choose your materials based on grade level and the size of the train you want: sturdy paper for posting the train on a wall, small boxes or shoeboxes for a display or large boxes that students stand inside and move. Match the activity to your social studies curriculum; for example, students could design their railway car to represent a province/territory or other particular region of Canada (e.g., the Prairies), what the trains transported, historical figures who were involved in creating the railway and people whose lives were strongly affected by the building of the railway including those who worked on it.

- » Have students make playing cards for a “Concentration”-type game based on the book. Use index cards cut in half or scrap paper cut to playing-card size. Have students choose 5–10 important words or phrases from the book and write each one on a card, with a small illustration of the word/phrase. They then make duplicates of their cards. To play, they combine their cards with a partner’s, place all the cards face down and take turns trying to find the matching cards.
- » Have students choose a topic for research (for example, the geography of a region where the railway passes through; the history of the First Nations people in a particular region; the navvies from China). They can present their information in a simple flapbook (fold a horizontal piece of paper by bringing the two outer edges in to meet in the middle; students write information on the outer and inner “flaps” and draw a picture on the space covered by the flaps).
- » Ask students to create a *Canadian Railroad Trilogy* trading card (like a baseball card; index cards work well) to make a class set. Subjects for the cards could be the writer and artist of the book, how a steam locomotive works, map of the railway’s route, geographical regions and important events and historical figures in the building of the railroad, including the workers. The cards should include a description or important facts about the subject and a picture or symbol.
- » Give each student an index card marked with a year and details about an important event from the building of the railroad (or have students do the research, depending on the grade level). Have them create a human timeline by organizing themselves chronologically in a line and reading the event to the group.
- » Have students choose a line from the song (or from another Canadian song) and create their own artwork to illustrate it. They might want to try the medium Ian Wallace used for *Canadian Railroad Trilogy*: chalk pastels. Point out his note about the medium on the last page of the book. Also point out the note he wrote about each of his works and have them write a similar note about their own.



## Activity Ideas for Grades 7 and Up

- » Have students create and illustrate a game board based on events of the construction of the railroad, or they could design plans for a video game version.
- » Ask students to study the pictures in the book to identify a stylistic element they really like and want to try in their own artwork; for example, a particular shade, a point of view or perspective, use of symbolism, a way to show light or a way to paint elements of weather. Ask them to write a note about their work, similar to Ian Wallace's notes at the end of the book.
- » Tell students that Gordon Lightfoot is known for the storytelling in his songs; have them listen to and read other songs he has written and choose one to retell to the class. They could give an oral retelling, create a storyboard for a video of it, sketch pictures describing it, or perform it, with an introduction they write.
- » Have students look for other books by Ian Wallace. Have them choose one and give a book talk about it. Encourage them to retell the story and also to comment on the style of the illustrations and make comparisons with his work in *Canadian Railroad Trilogy*.
- » Ask students to study and comment on examples of the songwriter's and/or the artist's craft; for example, Lightfoot's use of repetition and alliteration in "With our teardrops and our toil" and Wallace's perspective and pointillist style in the picture of Niagara Falls.
- » Have the class perform the song; some lines could be sung solo, some by two or three voices and some spoken. They could use a variety of musical instruments, sound effects and movement.
- » Have students choose a song that they think represents something important about Canada, or a song that means a lot to them personally, and create a picture book of it.
- » Ask students to imagine they are producing a CD of songs about a theme that relates to *Canadian Railroad Trilogy*, such as trains, the open road, laborers, Canada's First Nations, Canada's landscapes or events in Canadian history. Students select the songs they would include and create a title and the cover for the CD.

- » Have students search for archival photographs of the building of the railroad and choose one to write about, or to use as inspiration for a photograph, song or artwork of their own.
- » Have students do some research and then, in groups, role-play (or write a one-act play about) a meeting of people in the late 1800s who represent different points of view about the construction of the railroad.
- » Ask students to choose a part of *Canadian Railroad Trilogy* that intrigues them (for example, the danger of the work, the process of clearing the path or the effects of the railroad on the First Nations and Métis people) and have them research the topic. They could present their information in a monologue, song, comic book form, newspaper article or a PowerPoint slideshow.
- » Have a bridge-building contest. Supply groups with the same set of materials and criteria and have them build a bridge that will hold a specific weight.
- » Provide a large map of Canada and have students draw the railway on it and mark and illustrate important events along its route, as well as the geographical features of the regions. Alternatively, have them make a railroad track to post on the classroom walls as a timeline, with the important events marked and illustrated.
- » Have students research the history of railroads in Atlantic Canada.
- » Ask students to imagine that the song is going to be performed by an ensemble of well-known Canadian musicians. Have them choose which musicians, which lines they would assign the performers, where and for what occasion they would record the song and so on. Students can talk about the reasons for their choices in groups.
- » Have students work in groups to create a presentation for a younger class on a subject linked to *Canadian Railroad Trilogy* (for example, a history of one of the First Nations, or the Métis, who were affected by the building of the railroad; a history of Chinese immigrants to Canada; or a description of major events in the building of the railroad). After the presentation, the older class could read the book and listen to the song with the younger class. They could make a PowerPoint or Smart Board presentation, perform a skit, or create a heritage display, historical video or photo essay.

- » Ask groups of students to create a webquest for students their age on a theme related to the history of Canadian railroads. They should look for the best websites on the topic and then develop a narrative (including an introduction and conclusion) and a series of questions and tasks that are to be completed by the person on the webquest. The answers to the questions are found on the sites in the quest.
- » Have students imagine they have been asked to create one interactive display for a museum about the building of the Canadian railroad. Have them draw the designs for what they would make and explain what it would teach the museum visitors.
- » Ask students to imagine that a new high-speed railway or new expressway is going to be built right through their community (close to their home) and it would displace large parts of their neighborhood; but it would also create jobs and result in an improved transportation system. Have them write three blogs or journal entries about the effects and how they feel. The blogs should represent times before, during and after the construction.

