

# Open Up the Textbook (OUT)

*Enlarge*

*Complicate*

*Contest*

*Vivify*

Title: Chinese Workers & Railroads in Nevada

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In this OUT analysis, Fourth grade students will study Chinese workers on the Transcontinental Railroad to better understand their role in its completion and their treatment as an immigrant people. This OUT analysis provides students with documents that are meant to deliberately complicate and vivify the textbook.

The following 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Essential Question should also be addressed in this OUT:

- How do physical geography and natural resources affect the settlement of people and development of culture?

This strategy is implemented most effectively when students collaborate to analyze the texts in small, heterogeneous groups. The texts that accompany the textbook are complex and often include difficult vocabulary and syntax. For a few words that are likely unknown to students and unidentifiable based upon context clues, helpful synonyms are provided in the footnotes. Students should first annotate each text and then collaborate to answer the text dependent and specific questions that follow. Questions will highlight sourcing and perspective of the author, close reading of key details from the document that enlarge, complicate, contest, or vivify the textbook, as well as questions that help students corroborate (or not) the accuracy of individual documents. The writing task that follows is an independent activity wherein students will employ evidence from multiple sources to justify their analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

**Source A: The Textbook** – *Nevada: Our Home*, by G.P. DeBunnah, page 141-142

## **The Central Pacific Railroad**

The Central Pacific was the first great railroad in the West. It was organized about the same time the Civil War broke out in the East. For the first few years, surveyors studied, measured and laid out the western route. Then they began to lay the tracks or rails.

The first tracks laid by the Central Pacific were in Sacramento, California. The job seemed easy at first, but as workers headed east, the job got much harder. Laying track through the Sierra Nevada seemed almost impossible.

Some of the hardest work through the mountains was done by Chinese workers. They blasted and dug through walls of solid granite. The hours were long, and the pay was little. After four years of hard labor and many setbacks, the tracks for the Central Pacific finally crossed the border into Nevada. Laying rails through the Sierra Nevada was one of the most amazing engineering projects of the time.

## **Source A Questions for Consideration**

1. What is the source of this text?
2. In what part of the country is the Central Pacific Railroad located? Where did it begin?
3. The text describes the condition of Chinese Laborers in several different ways. List three phrases that describe their working conditions.
4. The text makes the claim that, "Laying rails though the Sierra Nevada was one of the most amazing engineering projects of the time." What evidence does the author use to support this claim?

**Source B: Secondary— Chinese Americans. Retrieved from ABC-Clio May 11, 2015**

[In the 1860s], a massive project that would require thousands of hardened laborers was getting under way—the building of the transcontinental railroad. By 1865, the Central Pacific Railroad... had begun work in earnest on the western portion of the transcontinental railroad but was suffering from a labor shortage. The pay for working on the railroad was low, and white workers were deserting the railroad in droves for more lucrative opportunities in mining, particularly after new silver strikes were unearthed in nearby Nevada. Charles Crocker, the chief contractor for Central Pacific, decided it was time to hire "coolies," a derogatory name for Chinese laborers.

From the moment the Chinese began working on the transcontinental railroad, they performed well and willingly took on the most demanding and dangerous jobs. ... The Chinese workers almost always showed up on time, rarely took breaks, and stayed in excellent health, hardly ever taking sick days. As they gained the trust of Crocker, one of the railroad company's founders, the Chinese were called on more and more to undertake the most difficult tasks, including working on a hazardous gorge along the American River known as Cape Horn. The Chinese laborers, who had become adept at using explosives, blasted a roadbed on the side of the sheer cliffs and laid the track around the gorge. Many Chinese lost their lives working at Cape Horn and in other areas, but no one kept track of Chinese casualties, so the exact count is unknown.

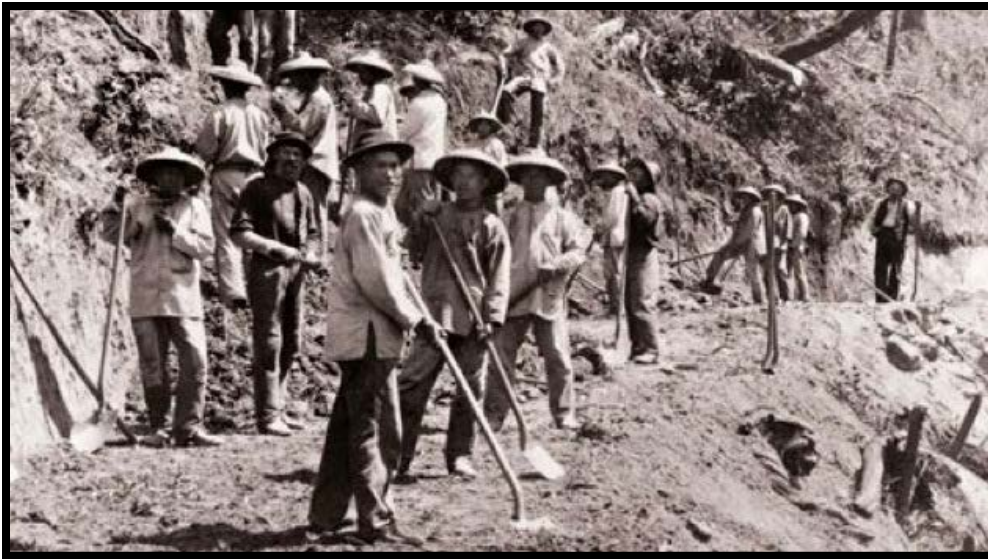
**Source B Questions for Consideration**

1. Break up the word “transcontinental” into its root and prefix. Look up what “trans” means. What other words use this prefix? Talk to a neighbor about what the word “transcontinental” means.
2. Reread the first paragraph. What events moved Charles Crocker to hire Chinese laborers?
3. Discuss: Was Charles Crocker’s decision to hire Chinese laborers on the railroad a good decision? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
4. **Source A** claims that, “Some of the hardest work through the mountains was done by Chinese workers. They blasted and dug through walls of solid granite. The hours were long, and the pay was little.” What three additional details would you add to your textbook? Explain why.

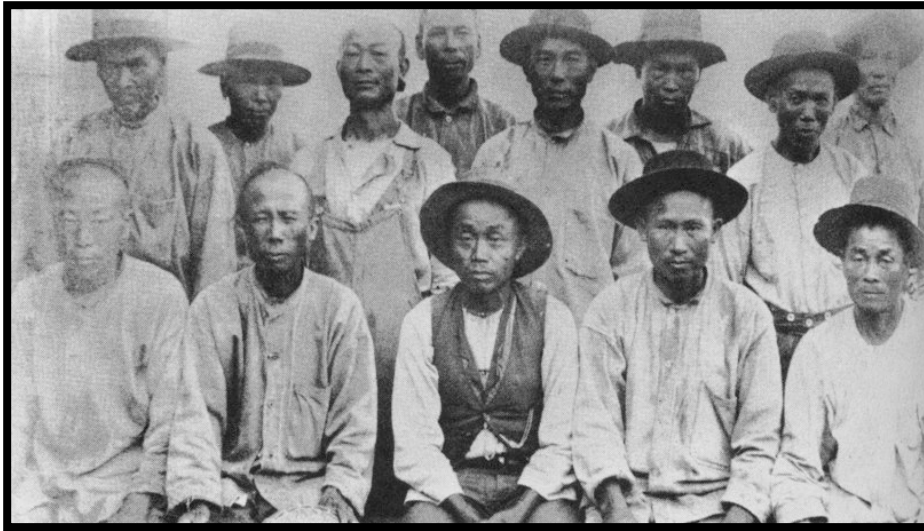
	Detail	Why?
1.		
2		
3		

**Source C- Primary: Photographs of Chinese Railroad Workers, 1869**

C.1



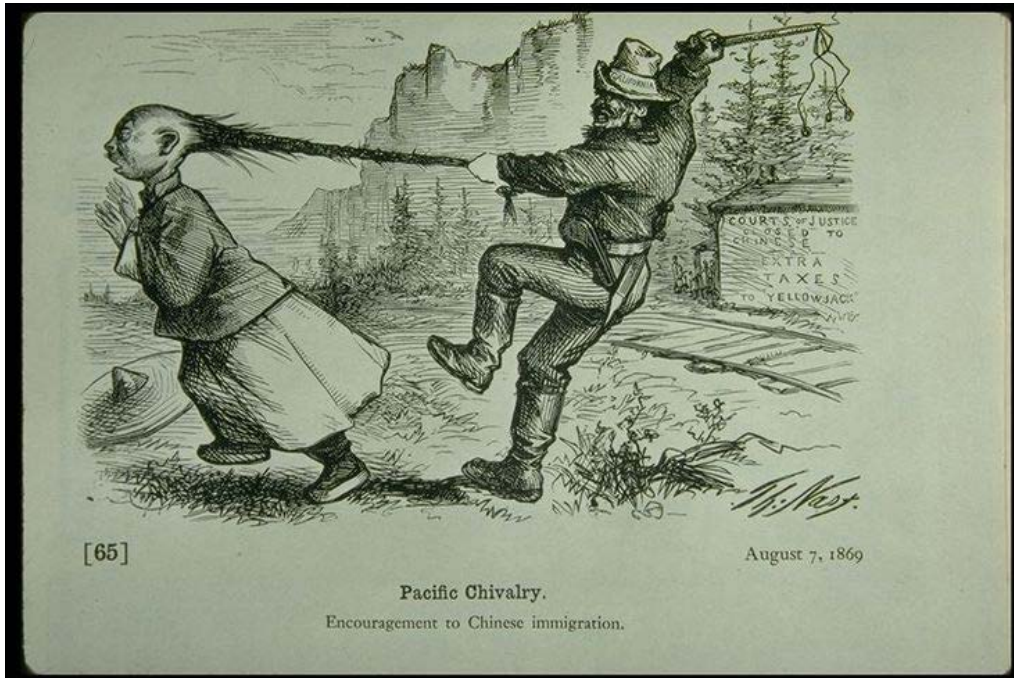
C.2



**Source C Questions for Consideration**

1. Describe the technology being used excavate the land in C.1. What details in Source A and B describe the work the Chinese laborers are doing?
2. Describe the workers in Source C.2. What are they wearing? Do they look as old as a big brother, a father, a grandfather? Why? How can you tell they have been working outside?
3. Talk with your partner about how a construction scene would look different today. Write a sentence summarizing your conversation.

**Source D Primary**—“Pacific Chivalry” Anti-Chinese Immigration political cartoon. Originally published in Harpers Weekly August 7, 1869.



### Source D Questions for Consideration

**Note:** Political cartoons are illustrations containing a political or social message that relates to current events. Their goal is to send a clear message through visual images, symbols and captions in the cartoon.

1. What do you learn about Source E from the information provided at the top of the page?
2. Take 30 seconds to examine this cartoon. List at least 10 details you notice.
3. Who does the man on the left represent? On the right?
4. Describe the action in this cartoon. What is happening?
5. The word “chivalry” refers to ideas of courage, nobility, honor, justice and a willingness to help the weak. Is the cartoonist using the word “chivalry” in an accurate or sarcastic way?
6. Based on your analysis of this cartoon, do you believe the artist supports Chinese workers or California mining? Explain your thinking.

**Source E Primary—Photograph of Chinese Railroad Workers, 1919.**



*Ging Cui, Wong Fook, and Lee Shao, three of the eight Chinese workers who put the last rail in place, on a float at the 50th Anniversary celebration of the completion of the transcontinental railroad in Ogden, Utah.*

**Source E Questions for Consideration**

1. What do you learn about this image from the source information (title, date, etc.)? What else do you learn from the caption?
2. How do these men differ visually from the men in Sources C.1 and C.2? Do they Chinese men look like a big brother, a father or a grandfather? Why?
3. Reread the caption. What details from the image prove that this photograph was taken during a celebration? What is being celebrated?
4. Why do you think the Chinese men are placed at the center of the photograph?

**Source F: Transcript of Memorial Plaque located at the Gold Run rest stop on Interstate 80 (2014).**



**Chinese Railroad Workers**

About 1000 feet from this location is the track of the transcontinental railroad. In 1865 thousands of Chinese in Kwantung Province China were recruited to work on this great connection between the East and West coast. This monument is dedicated to the memory of those Chinese laborers who worked for Charles Crocker of the Central Pacific Railroad.

(Tablet placed with the cooperation between the State Department of Transportation and the Placer County Historical Society.)

**Source F Questions for Consideration**

1. What do you learn about Source F from the information at the top of the page?
2. Based on the words in the memorial, what new information do you learn about Chinese workers?
3. A memorial is put in place to remind visitors of an important person, or group of people, or event. Think about how the message of this memorial is different from the message conveyed in the political cartoon (Source E)? Use evidence from the sources and the following chart to differentiate.

**How are Chinese Immigrants Represented?**

Source E: Political Cartoon	Source: Memorial

## Writing Task

This is an opinion/ argumentative writing task based on NVACS standards W.4.1. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the texts as well as the ways in which the textbook was complicated and vivified.

Write a letter to the editor of your textbook about why more information should be included about Chinese Workers on the Transcontinental Railroad. Provide and explain three to five of the most relevant facts you discovered as you completed the OUT.

- Use [business letter format](#).
- Answer the question in one page using evidence from each of the texts provided.
- Provide three pieces of evidence to support the claim: The Nevada History textbook does not adequately portray the historic role of Chinese railroad workers on the Central Pacific Railroad.
- For each piece of evidence use a direct quote or paraphrase (your own words), and add the source letter in parentheses, for example (Source B).
- For each piece of evidence, clearly reason (explain) why the evidence supports your claim. Underline your reasoning. Reasoning can be in the same sentence or the evidence or come before or after the sentence that includes the evidence.
- Choose 3 or more of the important vocabulary terms from the box below to include in your writing. Add at least two context clues for each term to demonstrate your understanding. Circle your context clues for each term.

engineering  
transcontinental  
Foreign Miner's Tax  
segregated

China Town  
discrimination  
casualties  
reliable

immigration  
laborers  
vibrant