



**Golden Spike Foundation**  
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## **Educator Instruction Guide for Students**

### Driving of the Spike: Golden Spike Monument

The following is for use prior to visiting Golden Spike Monument as it makes its way across the country from the artist's studio in DeMossville, Kentucky, to Brigham City, Utah, where the Monument will live.

Learning Objective: Students will discuss and evaluate elements of two projects, the work and workers involved, and each project's significance.

This packet provides guidelines about the history of the transcontinental railroad and the recently completed art piece commemorating it, with special recognition of the people involved in both. The packet emphasizes four key concepts of both projects: purpose, planning, process, and product.

## **Section 1: Purpose**

Before cars were common, before there were paved roads all over, before airplanes and airports, it took months – usually almost a half year – to travel from New York to California. In 1849 (174 years ago), a man in Chicago had an idea for a railroad connecting the east coast to the west coast. Following years of debate, imagining, research, analyzing, and presentations to government leaders, the project began in 1863. After it was completed, people and goods could travel from one side of the country to the other in 6 days.

The railroad that crossed the continent was an inspirational step that started with a vision, creative thinking, and problem-solving.

A sculpture commemorating the transcontinental railroad and the last spike to complete it began with a vision in 2021. The Golden Spike Foundation in Utah wanted to use art to help people understand more about all the workers and communities connected by the railroad project. They wanted us to think about the hard work, dedication, and collaboration among people that continue to inspire today. The artist, Douwe Blumberg, in Kentucky, submitted his idea of what a sculpture could look like.

Video: Learn more about the artist’s purpose for the piece at <https://spike150.org/the-golden-spike-monument-by-douwe-blumberg/>

Discussion:

- What is the longest amount of time it took you/your family to travel somewhere?
- What or who inspires you to try your ideas?

## **Section 2- Planning**

When the transcontinental railroad project began, much of our country was still being explored. There were only thirty states. The rest was organized into territories, and there were more stories than facts known about the “wild west” in the eastern “civilized” part of the country. What was the best route for railroad tracks across this vast area and those mountains? What obstacles would the workers have to deal with? Who would do all the work – really hard work – out in the middle of nowhere? What about the budget for this project?

Planning for this huge railroad project involved everything from land acquisition to finding workers to getting all the supplies to the work sites. The planners considered lots of steps, lots of possible problems, and time frames to manage deadlines and funding.

Planning for the Golden Spike Monument sculpture required some different elements from those used by the railroads, but design and materials, workers, and possible problems are always considerations. The sculpture plan involved steps to create, transport, and install it. The project team wanted the sculpture to be in Utah, ready for the public to see by the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the railroad completion, so time frames were all oriented to May 10, 2024. Your school is on the route from Kentucky to Utah, so part of the planning includes a visit with you!

Website: Learn more about the stops on the route to transport the Golden Spike Monument to Utah at <https://spike150.org/driving/>.

Discussion:

- Describe an important step in some project or goal you once worked on.
- Describe a time when you and others worked together to think of the steps required for a project.

### **Section 3: Process – Getting the work done**

A plan provides hope, but organizing thousands of people to work for years in areas where no one lives for miles around is a completely different operation! The transcontinental railroad construction required skilled workers and long days of hard work done by hand with only the help of horses and mules. Bad weather and other situations came up regularly, and extra decisions had to be made along the way. Each person involved had their own reason to stay dedicated to the project. Each step was an encouragement to keep going.

The sculpture coming by your school involves a team of dedicated workers on different parts of the project. The artist is the main “worker,” but you, as some of the first to see and think about the art piece, are part of this project. The organizers in Utah, at your school, and in communities along the way, as well as the truck driver, all have roles in the process of turning this idea into a reality.

Discussion:

- Describe a task or job you once had in a group project.
- Describe an obstacle you once had to deal with in a project or to reach a goal.

### **Section 4: Product**

Once the transcontinental railroad was completed, the planners, workers, and observers across the country immediately started to think about what had been done and what it meant. In addition to memories and discoveries during the process, they looked back to evaluate the job they each had done, even considering mistakes and ideas for other developments or improvements. They regarded the quality of their work and realized its significance would be even greater than what the planners expected.

As the Golden Spike Monument sculpture has progressed through stages of completion, its beauty and message have become even more meaningful. The artist is regarding how his creation meets his ideas and hopes. The organizing team members are all noticing and even taking notes on what they have accomplished, what they have learned, and how to point out creative project elements to you and others.

Discussion:

- Explain a time when you accomplished something and knew it was a good job.
- Explain something you once learned from working on a project, maybe as a start for another project.

## Background information

President Abraham Lincoln approved the Pacific Railway Act of 1862, paving the way for a rail line connecting the United States from coast to coast. The Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroad companies were given the job of building this connecting railroad. The Union Pacific started the rail line at mile marker zero in Iowa, and the Central Pacific company began their rail line in Sacramento, California. In total, 1,776 miles of track were laid: 690 miles by the Central Pacific team and 1,086 by the Union Pacific workers. It took 7-years of planning and construction before the two rail lines met in Promontory Summit, Utah, on May 10, 1869. There was a large celebration to celebrate this historic achievement, during which a small gold railroad spike was gently pounded into a piece of laurel wood that resembled a railroad tie. This is known as the driving of the golden spike.

Augmented Reality: View the gold spike from the 1869 ceremony in virtual reality at <https://spike150.org/unlockar/golden-spike/>

Discussion point: Why is this such an important part of our country's history?

The railroad played a major role in the development of the western United States. The transcontinental railroad

- Made it easier for people to travel from east to west, populating new towns and cities in the west. Before it was built, crossing the plains states, through western mountain ranges to the west coast was a long, hard, and dangerous journey.
- Opened opportunities to move goods across the country, including building materials, food, household items, packages, and more. Industries like agriculture and mining were able to expand their business and profits.
- Provided a new range of jobs and opportunities across the country and brought settlement to areas that became the future states in our country.

The United States realized many other benefits from this new rail line, which helped ignite our country's ability to grow and prosper. As considered for the Golden Spike Monument sculpture, the people who designed and worked to build the transcontinental railroad deserve credit for helping shape the future of the United States.

Also as considered for the sculpture, the stories of the people who worked to build the railroad and the people whose ancestral lands were impacted by the railroad deserve to be learned about and understood. Today, we know even more about the effects of altering landscapes and the unintended consequences to people, the environment, and natural habitats. Today, we know how to plan even better and consider the broad dynamics of people, places, and ideas in our country.