The First Railroad War

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BEFORE YOU READ:
1. Share what you know about the Civil War.
2. Brainstorm what the author might mean by “The First Railroad War.”

Introduction

The United States started to build the railroads in 1832. Railroads helped people get their merchandise and belongings to faraway places. This made the military look at the railroads closely. When the Civil War started in 1861 (due to the fact the northern and southern states disagreed on slavery and states’ rights), the railroads became the military’s dream machine. Thus started “The First Railroad War” (www.gatewaynmra.org/2004/railroads-in-the-civil-war).

Transport

Railroads could transport soldiers, supplies, and military equipment a lot faster than horse and carriage did. The Union controlled 70 percent of the railroads. They could move troops and machines more quickly than the South could. This allowed the military to take over the southern states.

Offense/Defense

Eventually, the military realized they could mount giant guns and artillery to the train and keep moving while they were shooting. One cannon called “The Dictator” weighed approximately 17,000 pounds. The military used trains not only for moving heavy artillery but also for protecting troops behind its thick walls. The military later modified...
these designs for ships in World War I and II (archive.freightrailworks.org/wartime).

**Conclusion**

The railroads created a faster and more productive military. Trains were used to attack as well as defend troops. They helped the North win the Civil War.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. According to the author, why was the Civil War called “The First Railroad War”?
2. List three specific ways that the military used trains in the war.
3. What is the author’s style for using citations? Compare it to the style of the author on pp. 21-23.
4. Look at the images below and research the topics to add to your knowledge of U.S. history.

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**Add to Your Knowledge**

Indians were almost completely wiped out by white settlers. What was the role of the railway in this process?

Railroad companies recruited Chinese people to work on the railroad. How did the railroad companies treat them?

**Write about it; use citations.** When you are doing the essay portion of a test (or doing any kind of writing), it is important to properly cite your sources. If you don’t, you may be guilty of plagiarizing! (Plagiarizing is when you use someone else’s words as if they were your own. To avoid plagiarizing, use quotes around other people’s words and cite your source.) But how do you write citations? There are many correct methods. The HiSET asks that you use a standard format. Pick one and use it consistently.