

To what extent was there a revolution in the way people travelled by 1848?

Suitable for students age 7-14

In this enquiry, students use primary sources to explore some of the revolutionary inventions and developments in transport in the early 1800s and their effect on people's lives in Britain. It can be undertaken as described or adapted to suit the teaching and learning needs of your students. It can also be used as the basis of an enquiry into Victorian transport. Students can undertake the enquiry individually, in pairs or in small groups. Alternatively the enquiry can be carried out as a whole class, led by the teacher. Images can be projected onto the whiteboard, printed or viewed on computers or tablets.

What do we mean by revolution?

- Discuss the notion of revolution with the class. What do they think it means? Can they give any examples of revolutions or something that's revolutionary?
- What would revolutionise their lives?
- Tell them a revolution is a significant change with a lasting and often far-reaching impact on a place or people's lives.
- Is it always seen as a change for the better?

How did people travel around Britain in the past?

Tell students the story of 'Blind Jack' Metcalf of Knaresborough (1717-1810) – one of the important road-builders of the time. According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography:

Jack was in London on business in 1738 when a friend offered him a lift home to Yorkshire in his horse-drawn coach. Jack declined, and bet that he would get home before the coach. Jack walked the 210 miles home to Yorkshire. It took him 5½ days, but he won his bet and arrived before the coach!

- What does this story tell us about the state of the roads in the 1700s?
- What does it tell us about how people travelled at the time?

The discussion can be widened by talking about the history they may have already studied. This might include Stone Age to Iron Age, the Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Tudors.

- How did these people come to Britain?
- How did they travel around Britain?
- Which of them built roads?
- Which depended on rivers?

Whichever periods the students have studied, build up a picture of slow, unreliable travel – most people walking or on horseback; goods often travelling by river or the long way round by sea rather than overland. No engines. No trains, cars, tarmacked roads or even canal boats.

How did transport change between 1775 and 1848 – the Age of Revolution?

Each student/group can investigate every object, or different objects can each be allocated for different students/groups to explore and then share their findings with the rest of the class through presentation, debate or making a class table like the one below.

Show students the following images:

- Locomotion I - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/locomotion-no-1/
- Launch of the SS Great Britain - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/launch-of-the-great-britain-steamship1843-lithograph-of-a-painting-by-joseph-walter/
- Velocipede - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/velocipede/
- Model of the Montgolfier Brothers' Balloon - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/the-montgolfier-hot-air-balloon/
- Forth and Clyde canal steam boat - ageofrevolution.org/200-object/forth-and-clyde-canal-steamboat-charlotte-dundas/

All of these were invented in the Age of Revolution (1775- 1848). For each one, look carefully at the image and use the notes provided to find out:

- What is it?
- How does it work?
- Who used it?
- How did it change transport?
- Did it have a big impact on travel, transport and people's lives, or a small impact?

Students could also discuss:

- Was it for carrying people or goods?
- Did it speed up transport?
- Would they use this mode of transport today? If not, what would they use instead?

Students can make a chart or table like this one to show their findings:

Mode of transport	How it works	Who used it	How it changed transport	Impact

As a class, try to decide which had the biggest impact at the time. There is no one correct answer, it will depend on what the class thinks is the most important. But they must be able to support their decision with the evidence they have been exploring.

To what extent was there a revolution in transport by 1850?

Ask the students if they think 'Blind Jack' Metcalf would have found walking the quickest way to get back to Yorkshire if he had made the journey from London in 1850? Was there an easier and/or quicker way to travel? If he had to make that journey in 1850 which means of transport might he use? If the children had to travel from London to Yorkshire today, how would they choose to travel? Why?

In the opinion of the students was there a revolution in travel and transport between 1775 and 1848 – the Age of Revolution?

In the opinion of the students has there been a revolution in transport between 1848 and today?

Which sources did students find most useful/relevant to their enquiry?

Try using these activities from the resource to support students' enquiries:

- Looking closely at paintings - ageofrevolution.org/education/activities/looking-closely-images/
- True or false - ageofrevolution.org/education/activities/true-or-false/
- Who am I? - ageofrevolution.org/education/activities/who-am-i/
- Revolutionary memes - ageofrevolution.org/education/activities/revolutionary-memes/
- Green screening - ageofrevolution.org/education/activities/green-screening/

Useful links

National Railway Museum, York - www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/

SS Great Britain, Bristol - www.ssgreatbritain.org/