

# The Legend of John Henry | Lesson Plan

Why is it important to work hard and never give up?

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Students will learn about the legend of John Henry and understand the themes of perseverance, determination, and the importance of hard work.

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to retell the legend of John Henry in their own words.
- Students will identify key themes in the story, such as perseverance and determination.
- Students will learn and understand new vocabulary related to the story of John Henry.

## Key Vocabulary:

- **Legend:** A traditional story with historical or heroic elements.
- **Perseverance:** The act of persisting despite difficulties or obstacles.
- **Determination:** The quality of being resolute in pursuing one's goals.
- **Human Spirit:** The essence of resilience, courage, and determination within people.
- **Railroad:** A system of tracks and trains used for transportation.

**Educational Standards:** CCRA.R.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.L.4

**Academic Topics:** Life Lessons, American Values, History

## What You'll Need

- Video: *Otto's Tales: The Legend of John Henry* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Otto's Tales: The Legend of John Henry* (Click [Here](#))
- Optional Extension Materials: Markers or chalk, construction paper, scissors, glue, pencils or crayons

## Lesson Plan (45 mins.)

### Warm-Up: (10 mins.)

1. Begin by asking students if they have heard any stories about brave and strong people. Ask students to share their prior knowledge.
2. Introduce the legend of John Henry, explaining that he was a legendary figure known for his strength, determination, and spirit.
3. Show pictures from the video or tell the story of John Henry in simple language, focusing on the main events and themes.
4. Introduce the key vocabulary words and discuss the meanings of each word with the students.

### Watch and Discuss: (25 mins.)

1. Play the video *Otto's Tales: The Legend of John Henry* for the students.



2. Pause at opportune moments in the video to ask questions and check for understanding of key vocabulary words and objectives from the lesson:
  - How would you describe John Henry's character traits?
  - What challenges did John Henry face?
  - How did John Henry show perseverance and determination?
  - Why do you think John Henry is remembered as a hero?
3. After the video, initiate an interactive discussion with the students. Ask questions to check for understanding:
  - Why do you think John Henry wanted to prove himself against the steam drill?
  - What challenges did John Henry face while working on the railroad?
  - How did John Henry's actions help the other workers?
  - Do you think it's important to work hard like John Henry did? Why or why not?
  - Have you ever had to work hard to accomplish something? What was it?
  - What can we learn from the story of John Henry?
  - Can you think of a time when you felt determined like John Henry?

Wrap-Up: (15 mins.)

1. Review the story's key themes, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and determination.
2. Ask students to reflect on a time when they had to work hard to achieve something.
3. Hand out copies of the worksheet *Otto's Tales: The Legend of John Henry* as a formative assessment to gauge understanding of the sequencing of events in a story.
4. Reinforce the idea that hard work and determination can help them overcome challenges and reach their goals.

### **Extension Activity: Build a Railroad**

Divide students into small groups. Provide each group with construction paper, scissors, and glue—instruct students to work together to build a model railroad using the materials provided. Encourage students to collaborate and problem-solve as they construct their railroads. Once the railroads are complete, have each group share their creations with the class, explaining how their railroad represents hard work and determination, just like John Henry.

### **Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15 mins.)**

Have the students watch the video and lead them in a discussion about John Henry's perseverance and determination.