

THE TEN MILE DAY

for grade 4

from the ideas of Miss Hokanson's Fourth Grade Class, Oakridge Elementary School



PLAN-B
Theatre Company



THE TEN MILE DAY was created as part of Plan-B Theatre Company's In the Classroom Program as part of Spike 150 and received its world premiere May 7, 2019 in two assemblies at Oakridge Elementary School. It was written by by Ellen, Grady, Max, Mina, Riley, Sean, Teagan & Tori, with guidance from Melissa Leilani Larson & Brandan Ngo. It was performed by Aditi, David, Evie, Ilena, Izzie, Jack, Max, Jasmine, Mia, Mina, Millie, Molly, Sofia, Tag, Xander & Brandan Ngo as Mr. Tushman. It was directed by Addison, Boston, Ethan, Izzy, Keagan, Lilian, Sean & Tia with guidance from Kelsey Hokanson & Jerry Rapier.

SETTING

Classroom 17 at Oakridge Elementary.

NOTE

All characters may be re-named to match the name/gender of the actors playing the roles. It's preferable for the teacher to be played by an adult but may also be played by a capable student.

(The STUDENTS greet THEIR teacher, MR. TUSHMAN, at the door. THEY are returning from recess; it's a rainy afternoon. THEY each give HIM a high five.)

MR. TUSHMAN: Good afternoon, class. Did you have a good lunch?

MILLIE: Yes, Mr. Tushman! It was great. What about you?

MR. TUSHMAN: I enjoyed my sandwich very much. Thank you.

(The STUDENTS all take THEIR seats.)

ADITI: What are we talking about today?

MR. TUSHMAN: We're going to review what we've been learning about the Transcontinental Railroad. Does anybody remember what that is?

(Several STUDENTS raise their hands. For the rest of the scene, EVERYONE in the class raises their hand and waits to be called on before speaking.)

MR. TUSHMAN: Yes, Izzie.

IZZIE: It's the first railroad that was built from coast to coast.

MR. TUSHMAN: That's right! What else do we know about it? What was the United States like before the railroad was built?

SOFIA: Before the railroad, there were only horses and wagons for transportation. It took a long time for people to get around.

ILENA: People lived on both sides of the country, but there was no easy way to get from the East Coast to the West Coast. So President Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862.

MR. TUSHMAN: That's right. The Pacific Railroad Act provided federal support for the railroad, which would take another seven years to complete. Does anyone know who built the railroad? Molly?

MOLLY: The Union Pacific Railroad was built from the east going west, and the Central Pacific Railroad started in California and went east. Then they both met at Promontory Summit in Utah.

DAVID: My favorite part was when they drove in the Golden Spike where the two railroads met. It was a big party.

EVIE: When the trains met, the crowd roared with excitement!

MINA: Yeah. Leland Stanford was the president of the Central Pacific Railroad, and they asked him to drive in the Golden Spike. But he was drunk, and he missed!

(Laughter.)

MR. TUSHMAN: Do you think these two companies got along? Or were they in competition with each other?

MIA: Competition! Central Pacific made a bet that they could lay ten miles of track in one day.

JASMINE: Really? That sounds kinda crazy.

TAG: The companies were really wealthy and could pretty much do whatever they wanted.

EVIE: That sounds like a lot of big companies today.

MR. TUSHMAN: It does, doesn't it? So the railroads called their bet "The Ten Mile Day". What do you remember about the Ten Mile Day? Mina?

MINA: Train whistles started the race! And both companies worked from dawn to dusk to lay track as fast as they could.

DAVID: Four men would lift these huge rails. They were 30 feet long and weighed 560 pounds. The men laid two rails every 20 seconds.

XANDER: Wow, that's fast!

(JACK responds without raising HIS hand.)

JACK: Yeah, it sounds fast. But they had to build so far that it took them years. It took them two years just to blow through the mountains!

(JACK makes a sound like an explosion, and EVERYONE gets really excited.)

MR. TUSHMAN: All right, all right, let's stay focused. Jack, you didn't raise your hand.

JACK: I'm sorry, Mr. Tushman. I love the explosions.

(All of the other STUDENTS agree: "Me too!")

MR. TUSHMAN: OK, everybody. Let's forget about the explosions, and get back on track.

(This is a silly joke, and MR. TUSHMAN waits for a laugh but the STUDENTS just look at HIM.)

MR. TUSHMAN: So. The Ten Mile Day. Where were we?

MAX: One team of workers would measure the rails and lay the spikes to hold them in place. Tampers would compact the dirt around the rails so they would stay.

MILLIE: Mr. Tushman? Who won the bet?

MR. TUSHMAN: Who can answer Millie's question?

ADITI: Central Pacific won! They were the first to lay ten miles of track in a day.

MR. TUSHMAN: Awesome. Thank you, Aditi. So Union Pacific and Central Pacific were the two companies that paid for the railroad. But who actually built it?

IZZIE: Central Pacific hired 11,000 Chinese workers who were working in the gold mines in California. They also hired Irish and African workers. But most of the workers were men who had left their families behind in China to find jobs in America.

SOFIA: That sounds awful. If my dad left to work in another country, I would really miss him.

MR. TUSHMAN: It was so hard to travel in the 1860s that some of these men never saw their families again.

ILENA: They must have really needed the money. They worked so hard on the railroad, and the bosses were mean to them.

MR. TUSHMAN: The railroad bosses didn't treat the Chinese workers very well, did they? We have a word for that. It's a big word— Discrimination. "To discriminate" means to treat someone unfairly because they are different than you are. So in this case, the railroad bosses discriminated against the Chinese workers. Does someone have an example?

MOLLY: There were fewer Irish workers, but they got to stay in train cars in the winter while the Chinese workers had to stay in tents.

MAX: The Chinese workers had to pay for their food and for their tents, but the Irish didn't have to pay for anything.

MIA: The bosses were American and they didn't know the Chinese men very well. They didn't think the Chinese workers were strong enough to build the railroad, but they needed all the help they could get.

TAG: Since the Chinese workers had different names, the bosses didn't bother learning them. They called all 11,000 men John Chinaman in their records.

MINA: But they wrote down all of the Irish workers' own names.

MR. TUSHMAN: Can you imagine what it would feel like if I came to school one day and decided to call you all Johnny Pupil? You couldn't be Ilena or Xander or Sofia anymore.

DAVID: I would be pretty sad.

MR. TUSHMAN: Yeah, you would. And it was really hard work building the railroad, wasn't it?

XANDER: Yeah. It was dangerous sometimes. The bosses would give the Chinese workers the most dangerous jobs.

JASMINE: Like being a fuse runner! They had to light the fuses on the explosives and get out really fast.

EVIE: And the bosses didn't care if the Chinese workers got hurt.

JACK: The men had to work in all kinds of bad weather.

SOFIA: Wow. Those workers were really brave. They did a good job even though the bosses mistreated them.

MAX: Yeah. They risked their lives to build the railroad.

MR. TUSHMAN: It's true, those 11,000 Chinese workers were really brave. And we may never know their real names. But it's important that we remember them and honor their hard work and their sacrifices. It can be easy to think that the Irish workers were better treated, but they also had a hard time. That's why they went out west, to get away from mean bosses who treated them poorly in the big cities back east. So while they were treated better than the Chinese, it wasn't that much better. OK, everyone. This year is the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. To celebrate that, our class has been asked to put on a short play about working on the railroad, and particularly about the Chinese workers. But there's a problem with our doing that. Any ideas about what that problem could be?

ADITI: We don't have a railroad?

MR. TUSHMAN: I hadn't thought of that, but you're right. Keep thinking. Look around. Jasmine?

JASMINE: None of us are Chinese.

MR. TUSHMAN: That's right. It's important that when we put on a play, that we do our very best to represent different cultures and races correctly.

TAG: So it wouldn't be right for us to play the Chinese workers in a play because we aren't Chinese?

MR. TUSHMAN: That's right. When a white person plays a part intended for an Asian person, it can be really mean and offensive to Asian people, like the Chinese workers.

MIA: We can't honor them and insult them at the same time.

MR. TUSHMAN: Exactly. What's the word we were just talking about?

EVERYONE: Discrimination.

MR. TUSHMAN: Right. Very good. Yes, Izzie?

IZZIE: I don't think I really understand what discrimination means.

MR. TUSHMAN: When you assume that all Asian people are the same color or have the same name or that they all look the same, you are reducing them to a stereotype. That is discrimination. Does anyone know what a stereotype is?

ILENA: A stereotype is when someone thinks a certain way about somebody else, because of how they look or what they think that person should be like.

MILLIE: It's like when people say that boys only like blue, and girls only like pink. I'm a girl, and my favorite color is green.

XANDER: Or when someone says that only girls are good at cooking. But my dad is a great cook. He makes really good pancakes.

TAG: So it's like when the railroad bosses looked at the Chinese workers and thought they weren't strong enough to work on the railroad.

MOLLY: Yeah. But really they didn't know what they were talking about, because all the workers were really strong, including the Chinese.

MINA: So since we aren't Chinese, it's offensive to make ourselves look Chinese just to put on a play?

MR. TUSHMAN: Yes. If you want to put on a play about Chinese workers on the railroad, it's important to have Asian actors to play those parts.

DAVID: So how are we going to write a play about the Chinese workers if none of us are Chinese?

MR. TUSHMAN: That's a great question. How can we tell the story of the railroad and the Chinese workers without actually portraying them? Xander, do you have any ideas?

XANDER: What if we just pretended to be the Irish workers instead?

JASMINE: But if we did that we'd be ignoring the stories of all the other 11,000 Chinese workers! That wouldn't be fair.

JACK: Let's just write a play about the explosions!

(JACK makes explosion sounds again. EVERYONE gets excited.)

MR. TUSHMAN: Jack, what did I say about explosions? And raising your hand?

(JACK settles as the STUDENTS chuckle.)

EVIE: Mr. Tushman, this is kind of difficult. I can't think of anything!

MR. TUSHMAN: Don't worry, it's definitely a difficult thing to think about. Millie, what do you think?

MILLIE: Well, I have an idea, but it's kind of weird. What if we wrote a play about us talking about the railroad and workers?

ADITI: You mean like we were just barely doing?

IZZIE: Oh, I get it! That way, we don't have to pretend to be Chinese, but we can still tell their story!

MR. TUSHMAN: Oh. Wow. That's actually a great idea.

SOFIA: I hope someone was writing everything down then, because we all said A LOT of things.

ILENA: Yeah, some more helpful than others.

MOLLY: So instead of playing the workers, we would just play ourselves? Like, I would be Molly, and Max would be Max?

MR. TUSHMAN: Yes, I think that would work really well.

MAX: That sounds pretty easy! I know me better than anyone else.

MIA: And that way, we can honor the work the Chinese, Irish, and African-Americans all put into the railroad!

MR. TUSHMAN: Great idea. We'll take notes on everything we learned, and write a play about all our important questions and comments about the railroad and the thousands of nameless workers that changed America forever.

(JACK raises HIS hand.)

MR. TUSHMAN: Yes, Jack?

JACK: And then can we add some explosions at the end?

MR. TUSHMAN: Tell you what, Jack. I will look into our budget. But no promises.

END OF PLAY