



Gandy Dancers: Laying tracks

All Aboard: History, Culture, and Innovation on the Florida East Coast Railway

Grade Level:

2nd Grade

Materials:

Photos:

- Henry M. Flagler
- FEC Railway Workers

Map:

- FEC Railway and Extension to Key West

Book:

- *The Gandy Dancers and Work Songs from the American Railroad* by Vanita Oelschlager

Additional Supplies:

- Lyrics to the song *Linin' Tracks*
- Shallow Trays
- Gravel
- Popsicle Sticks
- Air Dry Clay or Model Magic
- Toothpicks
- Kabob Sticks

Curriculum Connections:

Math, Social Studies, Science, Literacy, Music, Florida Education

Objectives:

Students will be introduced to the Overseas Railway and will learn about what life was like as a Florida East Coast Railway Worker.

Standards:

MA.2.M.1: Measure the Length of Objects and Solve Problems Involving Length

SC.2.P: Physical Science

SS.2.G.1: The World in Spatial Terms

VA.2.H: Historical and Global Connections

VA.2.F: Innovation, Technology, and the Future

MU.2.H: Historical and Global Connections

Corresponding Map Hot Spot:

Marathon, FL

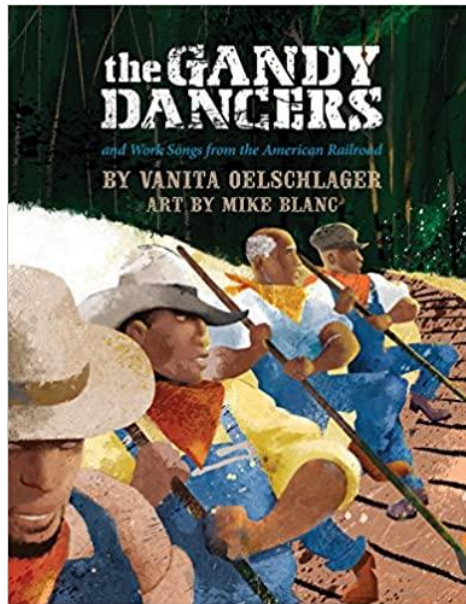
Lesson Procedure

Introduce the theme of the lesson:

The Florida East Coast Railway Key West Extension, also known as the Overseas Railway, and the workers who built it. Use the pictures of the railroad workers and the construction of the railroad to discuss how difficult and groundbreaking this work was.

Literacy Component:

Read the story, *The Gandy Dancers and Work Songs from the American Railroad* by Vanita Oelschlager.



Gandy Dancer Songs:

Talk to the students about how the people who did the work of laying railroad tracks were called “Gandy Dancers.” These workers often worked long, hot days. Rhythm was necessary both to synchronize the manual labor, and to maintain the moral of the workers.

The Gandy Dancers often sang to keep rhythm. Teach the students the following song and sing it together as a class:

LINK: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hYhvGMqwVY>

Linin’ Tracks:

Oh boys, is you right?
Done got right!
All I hate 'bout linin' track
These ol' bars 'bout to break my back

Oh boys, can't you line 'em, Jack-a Jack-a
Oh boys, can't you line 'em, Jack-a Jack-a
Oh boys, can't you line 'em,
Jack-a Jack-a See
Eloise go linin' track

Laying Tracks:

Divide the students into groups of 4. Tell them that they are going to build a railroad track just like the Gandy Dancers who built the Florida East Coast Railway. Give each group a shallow tray, a bag of gravel, two kabob sticks, some toothpicks, popsicle sticks and air-dry clay or Model Magic. Explain how the first step to laying tracks was to grade the surface. Have them pour the gravel into the tray. Next lay the railroad tracks (popsicle sticks horizontally running the length of the tray).

Have them make little balls of clay and stick them on the ends of the popsicle sticks. Stick the railroad spikes (toothpicks) to the clay on the popsicle stick railroad tracks, using two on either side of each railroad tie to make a holder for the kabob stick tracks. Place the kabob sticks into place and you have a track! You can play the Linin' Track song while the students work.



Closure:

Review the concepts of how train tracks are constructed and sing the Gandy Dancer song one more time.

Additional Resources:

[Overseas Railway Timeline](#)

This timeline on the Key West Art & Historical Society's website provides additional information about Henry M. Flagler's life, career, history and the development of the Florida East Coast Railway and extension to Key West, Florida.

[Online Collections Database](#)

With a collecting history that extends back to 1949, the Key West Art & Historical Society has unrivaled collections of contemporary and historic art and artifacts. Its collections, which number more than 35,000 works in all media, range from historical to present-day and span the entire Florida Keys.

Henry M. Flagler

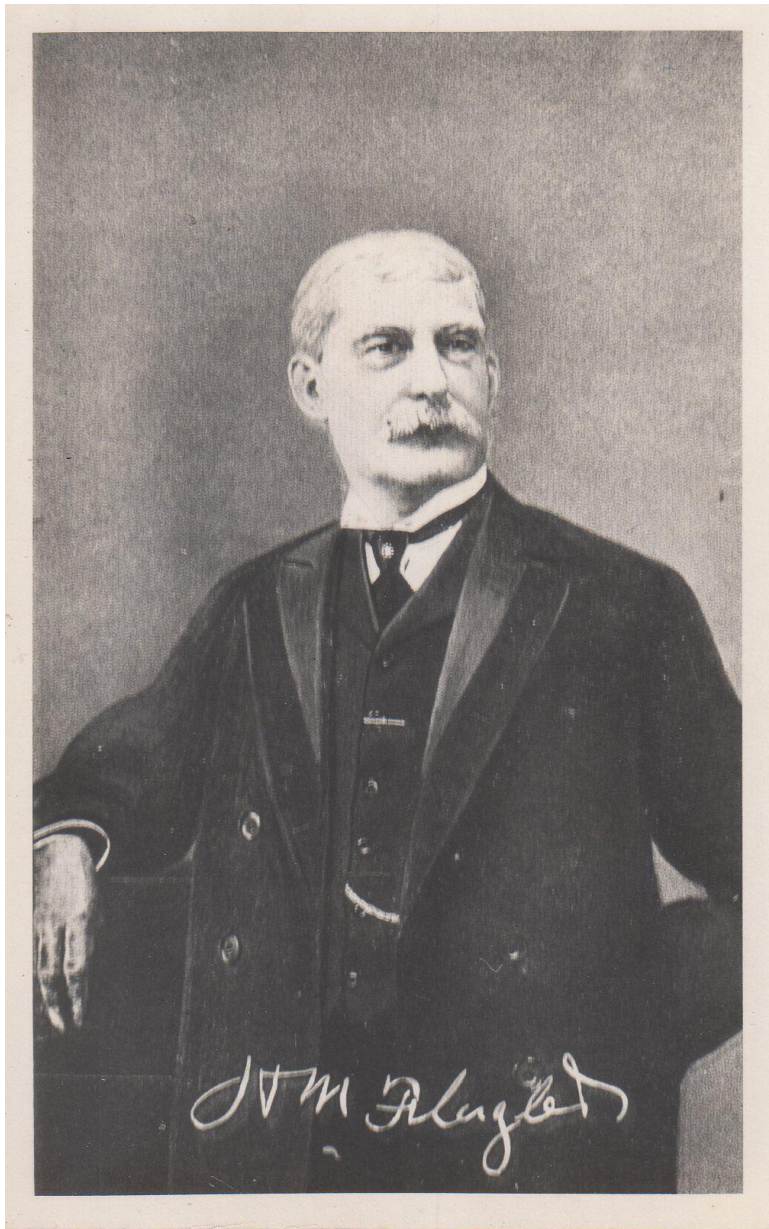


Photo: Key West Art & Historical Society

Map of the Florida East Coast Railway Showing the Key West Extension

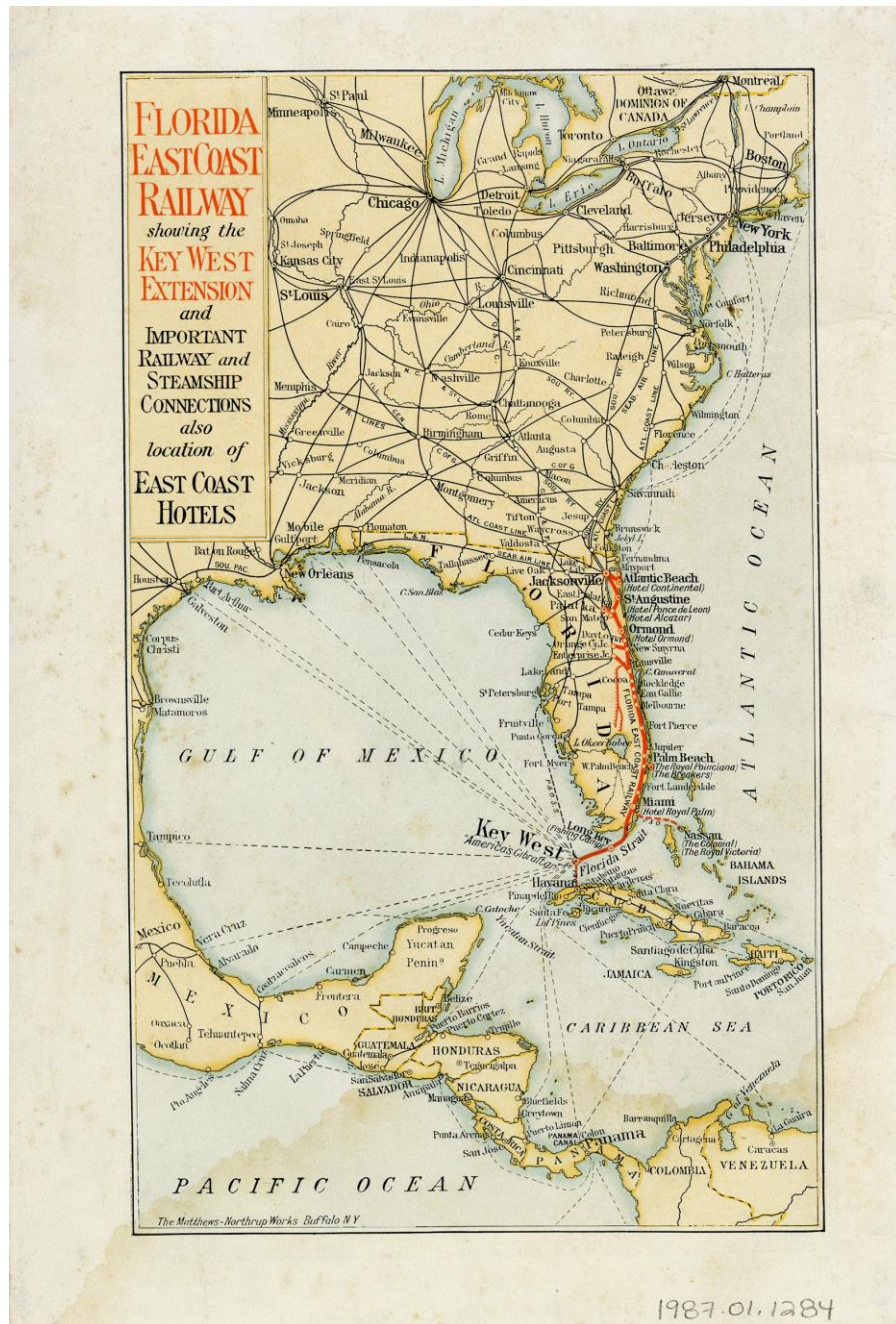


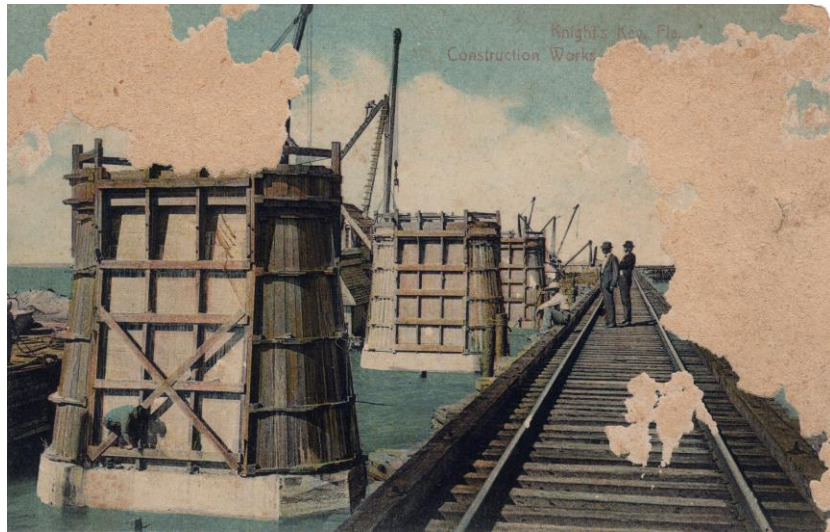
Photo: Key West Art & Historical Society

Florida East Coast Railway Key West Extension



Photo: Florida East Coast Railway

Postcards of Florida East Coast Railway Workers During Construction



Postcard depicting men constructing the Seven Mile Bridge on the Florida East Coast Railway. The caption reads, 'Knight's Key, Florida. Construction Work {illegible}'.

Photo: Key West Art & Historical Society



Building Knights' Key Dock, 300 feet Wide and 600 Feet Long, Knights' Key, Florida

Photo: Key West Art & Historical Society

Photographs of Florida East Coast Railway Workers During Construction



Black and white photograph of men working on a section of the Overseas Railway with steamships in the background.

Photo: Key West Art & Historical Society



Black and white photograph of men working on a bridge belonging to the Overseas Railway. Possibly Long Key Bridge or Seven Mile Bridge.

Photo: Key West Art & Historical Society

Photographs of Florida East Coast Railway Workers During Construction



Black and white photograph of hard hat divers working on the bridge piers for the Florida East Coast Railway Company.

Photo: Key West Art & Historical Society

Bibliography:

*Information is in the order that it appears in the document

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