

Train to Simla

Directions

Introduce the passage to the students.

The essay we are about to read is about a man traveling to a conference. At this conference the future of India and hundreds of millions of people will be decided. Within the story of the man the author has provided numerous context clues to help you understand what's going throughout the rest of India. We will be having a conference of our own in a couple of days to see if we were there history would turn out differently.

I want you to put your head down on your desk and open up your ears. Use your imagination to paint a picture in your head. We will be working with this passage after I finish reading so the more you remember the more it will prove helpful as you decide the fate of the crown Jewel of India.

The Train to Simla

Through the train's window, smeared with ^{dirt} grit and soot, you can barely make out the faces of the torrent of people surging along the station platform. But that swirling chaos is India: A red-turbaned Sikh, with a long dark beard; three dark barefooted children begging for food; a Muslim woman swathed in black; a nawab in a London-tailored linen suit; a young man dressed in the white homespun cotton—*khadi*—that Gandhi equates (says it represents) with Indian independence from British domination. And sprinkled throughout are British soldiers in khaki, walking with that brisk, purposeful swagger that won an empire—and may now have lost it.

So many people! The numbers spin in your head: 400 million in all. 300 million Hindus. 100 million Muslims. Millions more Sikhs, Pashtuns, Parsees, Christians, Jews. — Minorities And many are so needy, so poor: 60 million Untouchables, among them the children begging on the platform.

Yet somehow you have the train compartment all to yourself. You look at your watch. The train should have left the Delhi station two hours ago, before the summer sun begins baking the Ganges plain. The war has taken a toll on train schedules; the British army diverts locomotives and rolling stock whenever they wish. But then they always have. Railways have long been the rope that bound British India. To be sure, Britain had acquired India in the age of sail, back in the 1700s, when the British navy blasted the French and Dutch trading outposts from the harbors of India and established a monopoly for the British East India Company. Company officials had then used revenues from its trade monopolies to recruit and hire an army—most of it Indian—that over the course of a century subdued most of the native princes, Hindu as well as Muslim.

But effective control of the vast subcontinent came only with the construction of the railways in 1853. The telegraph system and a postal service followed in the next year. Then came tea from Assam, cotton from Bengal, coal from Orissa and Bihar, opium from the basin of the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers. Great mountains of products and resources moved along iron rails to Calcutta, Bombay, Madras—formerly sleepy ports—place to land that now became teeming centers of commerce and industry. And as Indian raw materials flowed out, British manufactures—especially cotton textiles—flowed in, with disastrous consequences for the artisan weavers and spinners of rural India. A few years ago, when Gandhi initiated his campaign for Indians to boycott imported manufactured textiles, he was fighting a battle first waged, and surely lost, over a century ago.

You recall Gandhi's Salt March fifteen years ago—in 1930—surely one of the most extraordinary protests in history. Ten years earlier, Gandhi had persuaded the Indian National Congress (INC, the Congress) to cease collaborating with British rulers, and he then launched his *satyagraha* movement, the word derived from *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence, or love), a concept of civil disobedience that Gandhi claimed was rooted in ancient Hindu texts. At the time all India, it seemed, rose up in opposition to Great

near
Ganges
river
Shri Ar
trains

finished
products

stop
working
with

East India
Company
worker
for Britain
profit

South Asia

place to land
boats

not buy goods
brought into
the country

Stopped buying stopped Indian/British gov.

Britain. Many boycotted British-made goods, ceased attending British schools and colleges, and quit their jobs in the British civil service. Even many Muslims, though unsettled by the Hindu overtones of Gandhi's campaign, took part in the campaign to achieve swaraj—independence. Gandhi sought to draw Muslims more closely into the campaign. You recall his 1919 meeting with Muslim leaders, just a few blocks from this train station, when he spoke in support of the Muslim caliph of Turkey.

Nonviolent protests

not ready

beginning again

Gandhi called off the first civil disobedience campaign when members of Congress attacked and burned a police station, murdering the constables. The people of India were not sufficiently schooled in doctrines of nonviolence, or so he had said. But in 1930 he announced resumption of the civil disobedience campaign through the Salt March to the sea, there to gather salt and dispense it freely, in open defiance of the British monopoly on salt distribution. Slowly he walked toward the sea, leaning on a bamboo cane, stopping at every village along the way. Huge crowds followed, and the eyes of the world watched. Weeks stretched into months. When he finally crossed the beach to the sea, he declared: "Watch, I am about to give a signal to the nation." Then he leaned over, scooped up a handful of salt, and lifted it up—an offering for the multitude. The crowd, now numbering in the tens of thousands, surged across the beach and dipped pans and pails into the salt deposits. The British, who had ignored Gandhi's walk to the sea, arrested hundreds and then thousands of his followers. Massive civil disobedience flared up throughout India. Perhaps 100,000 in all were imprisoned. A pinch of salt, sprinkled into the winds, and so falls an empire!

working against

man who decides what's right is funny

But not yet. Gandhi will not be walking to Simla. Like you, and like everyone else at the conference, he will take a train. A thought occurs to you: Might he be on this one? No. The train station would have been swamped with hundreds of thousands seeking merely a glimpse of the man who had become the conscience of India. Even rumors of his appearance would delay the train for hours. Again, you look at your watch.

You find it ironic that most of the nationalist leaders of India, when they are not in jail, spend their time on trains. They organize an independence movement by means of a technology that had ensured their nation's subjugation. It was just a mile out of the station, too, where a Hindu terrorist had detonated a bomb that had destroyed the train of Viceroy Irwin; you recall the train cars, blackened by the explosion, and you thought it a miracle that the Viceroy had not been hurt.

domination by Britain

You notice a commotion on the platform. Some British soldiers are running toward an Indian conductor, pointing to your compartment and speaking animatedly. The conductor frowns and shakes his head. Yours is a first-class compartment, more than is allowed for regular soldiers. But the conductor shrugs his shoulders—evidently the other cars are filled—and the soldiers clamber up the steps. You move to the window seat and arrange your papers. A few seconds later, several of the British come into your compartment, shirts drenched with sweat.

"Mind if we join you?" asks a sandy-haired soldier.

You gesture to the seats, and they sit down. A few minutes later you hear a thunk below your feet as the gears of the train engage. Soon it glides silently forward: one of the newer locomotives, sent from England just before the war.

"I saw the bunker where they found Hitler. Him and Eva," a corporal says. "Said to myself, 'War's over.' Thought I'd be havin' a pint at the Black Ox in Devonshire in a few weeks. Now I end up in bloody ~~hell~~." The others laugh.

"Wait 'til we're fighting Japs in the streets of Tokyo. You'll wish you were in ~~hell~~."

"The Japs shoot back," another adds. "Over here, with Gandhi's crowd, you hit 'em on the head, and they say, 'Why, thankee very much, governor. Why not punch me stomach?'" More laughter.

"India—a nation! What a joke," Devonshire adds. "It'll last about as long as the ~~whiskey~~ in this flask." He passes it around. One of the soldiers hesitates, glances at the others, shrugs his soldiers, and then offers it to you. You wave it away and again look out the window.

Now their voices are lower, but you can still hear. "They won't fight even to defend themselves," another soldier says. "They tell us to 'get out'—to 'Quit India'—but if we 'ad, they'd all be bowing down to Hirohito and learning Japanese."

"But we're not going to Japan. Not unless the admiralty figures how to get the Royal Navy up the Himalayas to Simla." More laughter.

"Once you get all the Indian leaders together, you'll need an army to keep them from killing each other."

"What a nation! They hate each other as much as us."

"And to be led by a man who gives speeches in his underwear."

The laughter, initially raucous, stops.

Sensing that they are looking in your direction, you open your briefcase, bulging with papers: treaties, population studies, reports on geographical and economic resources, newspapers in many different languages: Bengali, Urdu, Hindi, Marathi. You have much on your mind: the fate of all India. You cannot get the numbers out of your head: 300 million Hindus, 100 million Muslims, all ruled, at present, by several thousand Englishmen. You glance out the window and are blinded by the morning sun. You consider moving to another seat, or pulling down the shade, but you have been cooped up too long. And you know that as the train winds through the foothills of the Himalayas, the view will be spectacular.

stop
bloody battle
Conversation subsides. You hear mention of "Two Jima," and the soldiers shake their heads. Most seem to be glad that they have been detailed to Simla—on a diplomatic mission—rather than being sent to fight the Japanese. You learn that a task force was gathering at the British base in Bombay, preparing to transfer to the Far East. Where, exactly, no one could say. The Japanese positions in East Asia are crumbling—their attempted invasion of India had collapsed the previous year—and now they are everywhere on the retreat. *working for you*

The train crawls through the congested old city of Delhi. Children play along the track.

"There's the Red Fort!" exclaims a soldier with a trim, black mustache. You catch a glimpse of the great stone building. "I learned about it when I read history," he adds.

"Oh, Lordy. Him and his Cambridge days," Devonshire replies.

college in Britain
"If you had eyes, you'd see that it's a treasure, one of the marvels of the world. It's made of red sandstone and was built by Shah Jahan, a Muslim emperor in the mid-1600s. About the same time that Christopher Wren built St. Paul's Cathedral. Shah Jahan also built the Taj Mahal. It was a tomb for his wife."

"Hope she died first"—and some more chuckles.

1100's-1200's
likes center
The train passes the crumbling walls of old Delhi, some of them built by Muslim warlords in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. Many of the stones have been scavenged for huts and hovels for the Untouchables, who, prohibited from living in the main residential center, inhabit the outskirts of the city. You see that some of the walls have been blown apart. Were they destroyed by artillery during the great Sepoy Mutiny a century ago? *are stayed*

to make money
been angry
surrounded
Back then, the British East India Company, which had ruled most of India as a commercial venture, had hired Indians, called *sepoys*, to fight in its armed forces. For decades, sepoys had chafed at racist British officers and harsh discipline. Then, early in 1857, they were issued new Enfield rifles, which required soldiers to bite the tip off the gunpowder cartridges before loading. Rumors circulated—apparently true—that the cartridges were lubricated with grease from pigs and cows. This simultaneously infuriated Hindus and Muslims alike: Hindus revere cows as expressions of a cosmic life force; and Muslims are forbidden to eat pork, which they regard as defiling. *at the same time*
cows = sacred/holy

group of soldiers
You stare out the window. It was at Meerut—just 40 miles to the east—where on May 10, 1857, a contingent of sepoys—Hindu as well as Muslim—refused the new cartridges. The British threw the soldiers into prisons and bound them in irons. This enraged other soldiers at Meerut, who turned on the British officers and shot them. The sepoys went on a rampage, butchering British men, women and children. Then the sepoys marched to Delhi, persuaded the Indian troops there to join the mutiny, seized the Red Fort, declared the aged Mughal emperor to be the new ruler of India, and set about the work of strengthening the walls. They also slaughtered more British men and women.

^{fighting}
The revolt spread to Lucknow, Cawnpore, and other cities in northern India. Within days much of northern India was in rebellion against its British masters.

The officers of the British East India Company immediately mobilized. A combined British-Sikh force was put onto trains and sent to Delhi. They deployed on the ridge of hills just ahead, beyond the walls you had just passed. You feel the train slow as it begins its ascent.

Sikh are
another
minority

The sepoys, firing cannon from the fort, attempted to drive the British from the hills. But the British and Sikhs held their positions. The sepoys attacked and were driven off. Refraining from further attacks, they ^{stopped} resolved to make their stand behind the walls at Delhi. ^{decided}

Several months later a much larger British-Sikh army arrived, this time on trains carrying heavy siege guns. Those guns blasted the fortifications, and the British-Sikh soldiers poured through the gaps. Within days the sepoys had been rounded up and killed; the British reprisals were as gruesome as the earlier massacres of British in Delhi. But the Sepoy Mutiny had one lasting effect: No longer would India be ruled by the British East India Company. Henceforth the British government would govern India directly as a colony of the crown.

pay
back

You smile at the irony: That decision in 1857 is the reason why you are moving north to Simla. Because word is out that, 88 years later, the British are thinking of abandoning India, the "jewel" in the crown of British colonialism. The British governor—the ^{head} Viceroy—has summoned all the Indian leaders to a conference at Simla to see if India is now capable of self-government. That begs the larger question: Is India a nation? For that matter, what does it mean to be a nation?

British
officer

In ancient Greece, people felt their ^{loyalty} allegiance to their city: They thought of themselves as Athenians or Spartans. But India consists mostly of tens of thousands of villages. In China, people shared a deeply ingrained set of beliefs and practices called Confucianism, but India has no common beliefs or practices. The people of Puritan New England regulated their lives according to the Bible, which, though interpreted in many ways, constituted a common source of beliefs; so, too, the people of revolutionary France regarded the writings of Rousseau and the *philosophes* as beacons for a new set of beliefs, a new form of worship similar to the affection the Americans had for the Constitution of the United States. But the various peoples of India consult a bewildering ^{strange} variety of texts: the ancient works of Hinduism and Buddhism, as taught by a multitude of gurus; the Quran, as interpreted by different Muslim holy men; the more recent writings on ~~religion~~ ^{many} Hinduism and Islam. What ^{idea} can serve as the foundation for a new Indian nation? ^{leaders}

A knock on your cabin door. The Indian ^{waitress} steward brings in tea and biscuits, bows slightly to you but ignores the soldiers. Then he departs. You pass the biscuits to Mustache, who thanks you, and then you stare out the window. To the east, the Jumna River

gleams as the sun burns off the morning mist. The Jumna originates ^{god} high in the Himilayas, its waters nourished by the tears of Shiva, a Hindu deity. Or so the story goes. Several hundred miles farther east, the Jumna flows into the Ganges. According to another Hindu legend, the Ganges always renews itself and brings renewal to those who bathe in its waters.

You smell cow dung, which is used for fuel and fertilizer, and soon you see a herd of cattle grazing by the river. To Hindus, the cow is life: a giver of essential nutrients, a universal expression of mother-force and thus of life itself. Some Hindus insist that Indian independence will bring an end to the slaughter of cows by Muslims, who eat beef. Your briefcase contains a fat folder on the Cow Protection Movement.

But you have many similarly thick folders, each documenting obstacles to Indian nationhood. You reach into your briefcase and pull out the one on language. English, like the railroads, helped to unify the subcontinent. But if India breaks away from the British empire, will it declare its independence from the English language? And what language would replace it? Most Indians speak Hindi, but there are other major related languages: Bengali in the east, Marathi around Bombay. In the south they speak Telugu, Kannada, and Tamil, languages from an entirely different language family—Dravidian. In the Muslim provinces to the west, one hears Pushto and Urdu and even a smattering of Persian. And then there are the local languages—Kashmiri in Kashmir, Khasi in Assam, Sinhala in Ceylon.

“If these people are mostly Hindu”—you are startled by the voice of one of the soldiers—“why do all of the palaces have Muslim names?”

“Same reason we’re now going to call Berlin Churchillville,” Devonshire answers.

“And this”—Mustache speaks again, waving a hand ^{point of rest} as if to take in all India—“this plain is where the great battles were fought. It is the fulcrum of the entire subcontinent, high rich farmland just to the west, beyond those hills. All of the rivers on that side of the train”—he waves his hand toward the far window—“flow to the west, through the arid high country of the Punjab. Then they merge with the Indus River and pour into the Arabian Sea. All of the rivers on this side of the train”—he reaches past your face and taps the window—“flow into the Ganges and then into the Bay of Bengal. Two different rivers, two different peoples. Muslims in the west, Hindus in the east. Except far to the east, toward Bengal, where there is a province filled with Muslims. Don’t know why. Panipat—the village up ahead—has for centuries been the site of crucial battles. The most important ones occurred hundreds of years ago.”

“What did they fight with,” Devonshire smirks, “bow and arrows?”

“Elephants, too,” Mustache continues. “In 1526 Babur, invading India from his base in Afghanistan, charged across the plain and won a decisive battle at Panipat, allowing him to establish the Mughal empire. Thirty years later, his grandson—Akbar—perhaps the greatest Mughal ruler—won another key battle at Panipat. More challenges to the

Mughals came—and nearly always the armies converged at Panipat. Another Afghan invader attacked in the 1760s, and then the Sikhs, who were gaining power in the Punjab, attacked the Mughal armies at Panipat a decade later. Always the Mughals won.”
city
for Indians

“Until we came.” Another soldier, with a red face—hopelessly sunburned—called out.

“Right. The British East India Company ruled the most important provinces, especially those with trading potential. But it left hundreds of native princes in power—Hindu or Muslim. The Company didn’t much care, so long as the native rulers behaved themselves. It even built up some native institutions. The Company struck deals in most villages with the *zamindas*, well-to-do locals who were rather like the lords of the manor in feudal England. The zamindas loaned money and collected taxes, taking their share and sending the rest to the British. For a time the zamindas even dispensed justice. System worked like a charm. Still does, in many places. Even Gandhi regards them as part of the fabric of rural India, with its spinning wheels and all.”
make money
local governments
Country

“If British India worked so well, why are we leaving?”

“Who says we are?” Mustache continues. “Churchill says the Indians can’t govern themselves. That’s why they’re dragging all of these Indian leaders to Simla. They’ll put ‘em all in the same room and lock the door. By teatime they’ll all be dead, having murdered each other. We’ll be given the job of burying them all.”

The others laugh heartily.

And then the conversation stops. You know they are looking at you. You stare hard at the reports on your lap and jot some notes. The report consists of columns of numbers. In India, it is always about numbers, big numbers. Some you cannot get out of your head: 400 million. 300 Hindus. 100 Muslims. The numbers matter, especially now. World War II will soon be over. The democratic powers will defeat the German dictator and the Japanese emperor. Everywhere democracy is in the air, and it will doubtless come to India, too.

The train slows to a stop. No one seems to depart or get on, and then the train resumes its journey. Within a few hours it will begin its torturous, twisting climb through the foothills of the Himalayas; by the end of the day it will be winding around steep mountains toward Simla.

India’s climb to nationhood, too, will be a difficult one. The ultimate destination—at Simla—is nationhood. But the grade is steep, and the obstacles many. And if the train lurches off the track, many will die.

Name:

Block:

Train to Simla - Questions

Teacher:

Directions: Using the essay *Train to Simla*, answer the following questions in complete sentences. You may need to staple new sheet of paper to this one if you run out of room.

1. What does the author mean by the "rope that ties India together?" (pg. 1)

2. How did Gandhi protest British rule of India? Why did Gandhi call off his original civil disobedience campaign? Does this show anything about how powerful Gandhi is? (pg. 2)

3. What do the British soldiers on the train think will happen when all of the Indians get to Simla? What are the soldiers suggesting by that the Indians "would be bowing down to Hirohito (the Japanese emperor) and learning Japanese? (pg. 3)

4. Who are the seapoys? Why were the seapoys upset? (pg. 4)

5. 88 years after the Seapoy rebellion was put down what are the British thinking of doing? (pg. 5)

6. What do Muslims do every day that makes the Hindus angry? What do you think could happen if Muslims refuse to follow to listen?(pg. 6)

7. How has the English language unified India? (pg. 6)

8. What is the East India Company? How did they rule India? Who did they get to rule large parts of India? (pg.7)

9. Going into the Simla Conference how would you describe India? (opinion question)