

Summarizing

Name: _____

A summary keeps the main idea and the details that carry it, and drops the rest. Aim for about a quarter of the length.

The Canadian Pacific Railway was finished in 1885, and the last spike was driven at Craigellachie, British Columbia. Building it had taken four years of blasting through the mountains, and much of that work was done by more than fifteen thousand Chinese labourers who were paid roughly half what white workers received and were given the most dangerous jobs. Hundreds died. When the line was complete the government moved immediately to stop Chinese immigration by imposing a head tax. The railway is often described as the thing that made Canada a country, because it linked the coasts and had been a condition of British Columbia joining Confederation. Both of those things are true at once: it was an extraordinary feat of engineering, and it was built on labour the country then tried to shut out.

1. Summarize this in two sentences.

2. Which single detail would you keep if you could keep only one? Why?

3. What does the writer mean by "both of those things are true at once"?

4. Now cut your summary to a single sentence of no more than twenty words.

5. Name one detail you left out, and say why it could go.

Summarizing — Answer Key

1. Answers will vary. A good summary names the completion in 1885, the role and treatment of Chinese labourers, and the head tax that followed.
2. Answers will vary; accept any choice with a reason.
3. That the railway can be both a great achievement and a serious injustice — one does not cancel the other.
4. Answers will vary, for example: *The railway that joined Canada in 1885 was built largely by underpaid Chinese labourers who were then shut out.*
5. Answers will vary; accept any detail dropped with a reason, such as the exact place name, which does not change the main point.