**Book:** Across America on an Emigrant Train

**Reviewed by:** Estela Yap

**Level of Difficulty:** Medium

**My thoughts about the book and its suitability for my group:**

I had good reasons to choose this book as a summer read. It is short, has large print and many pictures, looks fairly easy to read, and most of all, it is about emigrants. Being immigrants, I thought it would resonate with everybody, me included. It is about the journey of Robert Louis Stevenson from his native Scotland to America on the first transcontinental railroad in the summer of 1879. The author quoted some of Stevenson’s observations and reactions to America including the treatment of immigrants and Native Americans. There is a lot of historical information about how the first transcontinental railroad was built. There is an abundance of big words, and my vocabulary list was really long.

Midway, I borrowed two DVDs on the transcontinental railway to supplement our reading. Both DVDs are available through the library. (Both are produced by the History Channel: The Railroad that Tamed the West and Transcontinental Railroad.) Though the class consisted of higher level students, I could tell that they were getting overwhelmed by all the technical words. I showed the movies on two successive days. They were very impressed and they perked up again.

**Students’ reactions to the book:**

The students agreed that this was not an easy book to read, but they appreciated the history and new words they learned. We talked about the Civil War (the transcontinental railway was started in 1863), the influx of emigrants to America in the second half of the 19th century and the displacement of the Native Americans. There were animated discussions not only about the treatment of the immigrants and their awesome contribution to the construction of the first transcontinental railway, but also the unfair treatment of the Native Americans. They loved the two documentaries and were awed by how hardworking and dedicated the workers of the railway were. The book tells about how the Chinese workers of the Central Pacific railway set a record on being the fastest tracklayers in a day, a record which has not been broken to this day. The Chinese students felt mighty proud! Overall, they were very satisfied with the book.

**Tips for other tutors who may want to use this book:**

This book looks deceiving. It is suited for higher level students. A student had to drop out because he could only understand a third of the reading material and had difficulty following the discussion.