Name: _____ Date: _____

The Pony Express Riders

Circle group

In 1860, there were no planes. No trains crossed the whole country. There were no phones. A letter from Missouri to California took weeks. Then a company started the Pony Express.

The idea was simple. Riders on fast horses carried the mail in a relay. A rider raced along a trail to a station. A fresh horse was waiting there, with its saddle on. The rider changed horses in a minute or two and rode on. After a long ride, he gave the mail to a new rider.

The mail was kept light. Riders carried only a small amount in leather bags. Many riders were young and did not weigh much. That helped the horses go fast.

Mail now crossed the country in about ten days. That was a huge gain.

The Pony Express did not last long. In 1861, a telegraph line was finished. Messages could zip over wires. The riders were not needed.

Questions

1. Where did the Pony Express carry mail from and to?

_____

_____

2. What was waiting for a rider at each station?

_____

_____

3. Why did riders carry only a little mail?

_____

_____

4. About how long did mail take to cross the country?

_____

_____

5. Why did the Pony Express end in 1861?

_____

_____

6. Why is the system like runners passing a baton?

_____

_____

Words to know

station: a stop along a route where riders could rest and change horses
telegraph: a machine that sent messages along wires
saddle: the seat that a rider sits on, placed on a horse's back

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Pony Express Riders

Triangle group

In 1860, there were no airplanes, no trains that crossed the whole country, and no phones. A letter from Missouri to California took weeks by wagon or ship. Then a company started the Pony Express.

The idea was simple. Riders on fast horses would carry the mail in relays, like runners passing a baton. A rider galloped along a trail until he reached a station. There, a fresh horse was waiting, already saddled. The rider swapped horses in a minute or two and kept going. After a long stretch, he handed the mail to a new rider.

To keep the load light, riders carried only a small amount of mail in leather bags on the saddle. Many riders were young and did not weigh much, which also helped the horses go fast.

With this system, mail crossed the country in about ten days. That was a huge improvement.

The Pony Express did not last long. In 1861, a telegraph line was finished, and messages could travel over wires in moments. The riders were no longer needed.

Questions

1. Where did the Pony Express carry mail from and to?

_____

_____

2. What was waiting for a rider at each station?

_____

_____

3. Why did riders carry only a small amount of mail?

_____

_____

4. About how long did mail take to cross the country with the Pony Express?

_____

_____

5. Why did the Pony Express end in 1861?

_____

_____

6. Why is the system compared to runners passing a baton?

_____

_____

Words to know

relays: a way of doing a long job in parts, with a new person taking over each part
station: a stop along a route where riders could rest and change horses
telegraph: a machine that sent messages along wires
saddle: the seat that a rider sits on, placed on a horse's back

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Pony Express Riders

Square group

In 1860, there were no airplanes, no railroads spanning the entire continent, and certainly no telephones. A letter traveling from Missouri to California took several weeks by wagon or by ship. Then a business venture called the Pony Express set out to change that.

The concept was remarkably simple. Riders mounted on swift horses would carry the mail in relays, much like runners passing a baton from hand to hand. A rider galloped along the trail until reaching a station, where a fresh horse stood waiting, already saddled. He exchanged horses within a minute or two and continued onward. After a long stretch, he handed the mail to a new rider.

To keep the burden light, riders carried only a modest amount of mail in leather pouches fastened to the saddle. Many riders were young and slender, which also allowed the horses to move faster.

Under this system, mail crossed the country in roughly ten days, an enormous improvement.

Nevertheless, the Pony Express was short-lived. In 1861, a telegraph line was completed, and messages could travel across wires almost instantly. The riders were no longer necessary.

Questions

1. Between which two places did the Pony Express carry the mail?

_____

_____

2. What was waiting for a rider at each station?

_____

_____

3. Why did riders carry only a modest amount of mail?

_____

_____

4. Roughly how long did mail take to cross the country under this system?

_____

_____

5. What caused the Pony Express to end in 1861?

_____

_____

6. Why does the passage compare the system to runners passing a baton?

_____

_____

Words to know

relays: a way of doing a long job in parts, with a new person taking over each part
station: a stop along a route where riders could rest and change horses
telegraph: a machine that sent messages along wires
saddle: the seat that a rider sits on, placed on a horse's back

Talk together (every group has these)

1. Find one fact that every group read. How did your sheet say it?
2. What did your sheet tell you that you think another group's did not? Ask them.
3. What is one question about this topic that none of the sheets answered?

For the teacher: The Pony Express Riders

Each student sheet carries a shape, not a level. The same topic and facts, written three ways.

Circle: The Pony Express Riders

Easier · 153 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 2.9

1. From Missouri to California.
2. A fresh horse with its saddle on.
3. A light load helped the horses go fast.
4. About ten days.
5. The telegraph line was finished and sent messages much faster.
6. Each rider or horse did one part and then handed the job to the next.

Triangle: The Pony Express Riders

This passage · 174 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 5.1

1. From Missouri to California.
2. A fresh horse, already saddled.
3. A light load let the horses go fast.
4. About ten days.
5. The telegraph line was finished and sent messages much faster.
6. Each rider or horse did one part of the trip and then handed the job to the next one.

Square: The Pony Express Riders

Harder · 185 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 8.1

1. Between Missouri and California.
2. A fresh horse that was already saddled.
3. A lighter load allowed the horses to travel faster.
4. Roughly ten days.
5. The telegraph line was completed and carried messages far faster.
6. Each rider or horse completed one part of the journey and then handed the task to the next.