Name: _____ Date: _____

Wires Across the Continent in 1861

Circle group

In the fall of 1861, a message flashed across the United States. It went from the Pacific coast to the East. It traveled on one wire over plains, deserts, and mountains. The wire joined two lines, one from the east and one from the west. Now people on both sides of the country could talk in minutes.

Before this, news from California took days or weeks to reach the East. Letters went by ship or stagecoach. The fastest Pony Express riders took about ten days to cross the middle of the country. Business owners, editors, and families had to wait.

The telegraph sent electric pulses along a wire. Operators tapped out messages in Morse code. Morse code uses short and long signals called dots and dashes. At the far end, another operator heard the clicks and wrote down the words.

Building the line was hard. Crews started at both ends. They set up poles and strung wire across empty land. They met in Salt Lake City in October of 1861. Soon the Pony Express stopped. A wire was faster than any horse.

Questions

1. What did the new wire join?

_____

_____

2. How long did the fastest riders take to cross the middle of the country?

_____

_____

3. How did the telegraph carry messages?

_____

_____

4. What is Morse code?

_____

_____

5. Where did the two crews meet?

_____

_____

6. Why did the Pony Express stop soon after?

_____

_____

Words to know

telegraph: a machine that sends messages over wires using electricity
stagecoach: a horse-drawn coach that carried people and mail
pulses: short bursts of electric current
operators: people who run a machine or a system
signals: marks or sounds that carry a message

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: _____

Wires Across the Continent in 1861

Triangle group

In the autumn of 1861, a message flashed across the United States from the Pacific coast to the East. It traveled along a single wire strung over plains, deserts, and mountains. The wire had just joined two lines, one that began in the east and one that began in the west, and it let people on opposite sides of the country talk within minutes.

Before then, news from California took days or even weeks to reach the East. Letters went by ship or by stagecoach, and the fastest riders of the Pony Express needed about ten days to carry a message across the middle of the country. Business owners, newspaper editors, and families all had to wait.

The telegraph worked by sending electric pulses along a wire. Operators tapped out messages in Morse code, a system of short and long signals called dots and dashes. At the far end, another operator listened to the clicks and wrote down the words.

Building the line was hard work. Crews started from both ends, setting up poles, stringing wire, and hauling supplies across empty land. They met in Salt Lake City in October of 1861. Soon afterward, the Pony Express shut down, because a wire could carry news faster than any horse.

Questions

1. What did the new wire join together?

_____

_____

2. About how long did the fastest riders need to cross the middle of the country?

_____

_____

3. How did the telegraph carry messages?

_____

_____

4. What is Morse code?

_____

_____

5. Where did the two crews meet?

_____

_____

6. Why did the Pony Express shut down soon after the line was finished?

_____

_____

Words to know

telegraph: a machine that sends messages over wires using electricity
stagecoach: a horse-drawn coach that carried people and mail
pulses: short bursts of electric current
operators: people who run a machine or a system
signals: marks or sounds that carry a message

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: _____

Wires Across the Continent in 1861

Square group

During the autumn of 1861, a message flashed across the United States from the Pacific coast to the East. It traveled along a single wire stretched over plains, deserts, and mountain ranges. The wire had just connected two lines, one that began in the east and another that began in the west, and it allowed people on opposite sides of the continent to communicate within minutes.

Previously, news from California required days or even weeks to reach the East. Letters traveled by ship or by stagecoach, and the swiftest riders of the Pony Express needed about ten days to carry a message across the middle of the country. Business owners, newspaper editors, and ordinary families all had to wait patiently for word.

The telegraph operated by sending electric pulses along a wire. Operators tapped out messages in Morse code, a system of short and long signals known as dots and dashes. At the receiving end, another operator listened to the clicks and wrote down the words.

Building the line was demanding labor. Crews began at both ends, raising poles, stringing wire, and hauling supplies across vast stretches of empty land. They finally met in Salt Lake City in October of 1861. Soon afterward, the Pony Express closed down, because a wire could carry news faster than any horse could gallop.

Questions

1. What did the new wire connect?

_____

_____

2. About how long did the swiftest Pony Express riders need to cross the middle of the country?

_____

_____

3. How did the telegraph deliver messages?

_____

_____

4. What is Morse code?

_____

_____

5. Where did the crews finally meet?

_____

_____

6. Why did the Pony Express close down soon after the line was complete?

_____

_____

Words to know

telegraph: a machine that sends messages over wires using electricity
stagecoach: a horse-drawn coach that carried people and mail
pulses: short bursts of electric current
operators: people who run a machine or a system
signals: marks or sounds that carry a message

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: Wires Across the Continent in 1861

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

Circle: Wires Across the Continent in 1861

Easier · 180 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 4.2

1. A line from the east and a line from the west.
2. About ten days.
3. It sent electric pulses along a wire.
4. Short and long signals called dots and dashes.
5. In Salt Lake City.
6. A wire was faster than any horse.

Triangle: Wires Across the Continent in 1861

This passage · 207 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 7.6

1. A line from the east and a line from the west.
2. About ten days.
3. It sent electric pulses along a wire.
4. A system of short and long signals called dots and dashes.
5. In Salt Lake City.
6. A wire could carry news faster than any horse.

Square: Wires Across the Continent in 1861

Harder · 218 words · Flesch-Kincaid grade 9.4

1. A line that began in the east and a line that began in the west.
2. About ten days.
3. By sending electric pulses along a wire.
4. A system of short and long signals known as dots and dashes.
5. In Salt Lake City.
6. A wire could carry news faster than any horse.