Westward Expansion
The Pony Express

Before the Transcontinental\(^1\) Railroad was completed, the Pony Express was the fastest way to send messages across the country. They used horses and riders to send news across 1,966 miles. The Pony Express operated through Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada, and California. The riders rode as fast as they could. They carried mail in every type of weather. They traveled by day and by night. The Pony Express operated only from April 1860 to October 1861, but the organization and its riders became legendary.\(^2\)

Each rider earned 100 dollars a month. According to one source, the text below was an original advertisement printed in a California newspaper. The ad was meant to recruit\(^3\) riders. Does your spirit of adventure call you to answer this ad?

\begin{quote}
WANTED
Young, skinny, wiry fellows.
Not over 18.
Must be expert riders.
Willing to risk death daily.
Orphans preferred.
\end{quote}

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\(^1\) transcontinental – across the continent
\(^2\) legendary – extremely well known
\(^3\) recruit – to seek new people for jobs
1. The Pony Express traveled through all of the following states except for
   a. Utah.
   b. Nevada.
   c. Nebraska.
   d. Kentucky.

2. If you wanted to be a Pony Express rider you needed to be
   a. older than 18.
   b. a woman.
   c. scared of horses.
   d. younger than 18.

3. After reading the ad for recruiting Pony Express riders, you could predict that
   a. it was a dangerous job.
   b. it was a relaxing job.
   c. anyone could be a Pony Express rider.
   d. the riders were scared of heights.

4. Which of the following is not true about the Pony Express?
   a. It operated for many years.
   b. Riders traveled as far as 1,966 miles.
   c. A rider might travel through Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado.
   d. Riders need to be expert riders.

5. The passage “The Pony Express” is mostly about
   a. different types of horses.
   b. an old way to deliver mail.
   c. the type of person that makes the best rider.
   d. the Transcontinental Railroad.
6. What kind of person would have chosen to be a Pony Express rider? Support your answer with at least 2 details from the text.
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

7. In what conditions would the riders for the Pony Express ride?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

The Pony Express was the fastest way to send messages across the United States _______ the Transcontinental Railroad was finished.

a. until  
b. after  
c. unless  
d. although

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

In the 1860s, Pony Express riders risked death daily while traveling across the country.

Who? Pony Express riders

When? _________________________________________________________

(did) What? ______________________________________________________

Where? _________________________________________________________


Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: ________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: Before the railroad, the Pony Express was the fastest way to send a message across the country. The riders carried mail in all sorts of conditions, and the Pony Express became legendary.

1. The Pony Express traveled through all of the following states except for
   a. Utah.
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2. If you wanted to be a Pony Express rider you needed to be
   a. older than 18.
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5. The passage “The Pony Express” is mostly about
   a. different types of horses.
   b. an old way to deliver mail.
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   d. the Transcontinental Railroad.
6. What kind of person would have chosen to be a Pony Express rider? Support your answer with at least 2 details from the text.

   Suggested answer: Answers will vary but could include brave because of the danger involved with the travel and weather; strong because of needing to be able to ride fast for days; or adventurous because the ad says they “risk death daily.”

7. In what conditions would the riders for the Pony Express ride?

   Suggested answer: Riders for the Pony Express rode in all sorts of conditions – all types of weather, day or night.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

   The Pony Express was the fastest way to send messages across the United States ______ the Transcontinental Railroad was finished.

   a. until  
   b. after  
   c. unless  
   d. although

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

   In the 1860s, Pony Express riders risked death daily while traveling across the country.

   Who? Pony Express riders

   When? in the 1860s

   (did) What? risked death daily

   Where? traveling across the country


   Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.