

READING COMPREHENSION

GRADE 5

READ AND DISCOVER

Directions: Read "The Pony Express" and answer the questions.

1. What was the primary purpose of the Pony Express?
 A delivering gold to California
 B providing horses for cowboys
 C cutting travel time for mail delivery
 D building stagecoaches
2. In which year did the Pony Express start its mail service?
 A 1830
 B 1845
 C 1850
 D 1870
3. How long did the Pony Express take to deliver mail from Missouri to California?

THE PONY EXPRESS

Today, there are many ways to quickly send messages halfway across the world, whether it's a text, email, or even video chat. It is very easy for us to talk to people far away. That was not always the case. Long ago, people relied on the postal service to communicate with others.

In 1850, it took about 25 days to send a letter from one side of the United States to California. In those days, California was quickly growing. Thousands of people moved to California in hopes of finding gold. The problem was that because they moved so far away, it was hard to communicate with family and friends they had left behind on the other side of the country. It took a very long time to deliver messages, newspapers, and mail.

In 1850, three businessmen, William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, and William G. Waddell, made a solution. Together, they started the Pony Express. The Pony Express was a mail service that started in Joseph, Missouri. It stretched for 1,900 miles to Sacramento, California. They wanted to cut the travel time in half, so they wanted to be able to get a letter from Missouri to California in only 10 days. Many people thought this was impossible.

The three men knew that having riders instead of stagecoaches would be much faster and easier. They hired 120 riders and bought 400 horses. They also built 154 stations. Riders had to be under 125 pounds so that the horses didn't have to carry a heavy load. The riders were only allowed to take a gun for protection, some food, and their mochila.

The mochila (Spanish for backpack) was a pouch that carried the letters. Each pouch could hold up to 20 pounds of mail. There was a station every ten miles along the 1,900-mile route. The riders would ride a horse of full speed from one station to the next. They would then switch to a fresh horse and ride the next leg. They would ride both day and night.

Even though it worked well, the Pony Express only lasted for 19 months. Part of the reason was that it was very expensive to send a letter through the Pony Express. At first, the price was \$5 per 1/2 ounce. That would be about \$130 in today's money. The price was lowered, but a lot of people still couldn't afford it. The invention of the telegraph also caused the Pony Express to end. The telegraph allowed instant communication across the country. The Pony Express couldn't compete with that. On October 26, 1861, the Pony Express closed. This was just two days after the announcement of the transcontinental telegraph.

The Pony Express was an amazing service. It may seem very old-fashioned to us. When you think about it, though, it should make us much more thankful for the quick ways that we can communicate with people all over the world today.



Shelly Rees

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Table of Contents Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection

1. Understanding the eBook Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Personalized Recommendations

- Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection User Reviews and Ratings
- Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection Free and Paid eBooks
 - Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection Public Domain eBooks
 - Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection eBook Subscription Services
 - Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection Compatibility with Devices
 - Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Interactive Elements Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
- 8. Staying Engaged with Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Setting Reading Goals Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection
 - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Reading Comprehension Workbook Collection

- Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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