



The Pony Express

7

✓ Lesson Objectives

Core Content Objectives

Students will:

- ✓ Identify the Pony Express as a horseback mail delivery system

Language Arts Objectives

The following language arts objectives are addressed in this lesson. Objectives aligning with the Common Core State Standards are noted with the corresponding standard in parentheses. Refer to the Alignment Chart for additional standards addressed in all lessons in this domain.

Students will:

- ✓ Identify the main topic of “The Pony Express” by creating a quilt square (RI.2.2)
- ✓ Describe the connection between a series of historical events such as the Pony Express and westward expansion (RI.2.3)
- ✓ With assistance, create and interpret a timeline related to the Pony Express and westward expansion (RI.2.7)
- ✓ Write simple sentences to represent details or information from “The Pony Express” (W.2.2)
- ✓ Make personal connections (orally or in writing) to events or experiences in a read-aloud and/or make connections among several read-alouds (W.2.8)
- ✓ Draw pictures to represent details or information from “The Pony Express” (SL.2.5)
- ✓ Prior to listening to “The Pony Express,” identify what they know and have learned about transportation and people moving westward

- ✓ Rehearse and perform poems, stories, and plays for an audience using eye contact, appropriate volume, and clear enunciation
- ✓ Share writing with others

Core Vocabulary

endurance, n. The ability to go on for a long time despite pain or discomfort

Example: Olympic athletes have great endurance and can exercise for a very long time.

Variation(s): none

landmarks, n. Objects or structures on land that are easy to see and recognize

Example: The ruins of the Parthenon and the Acropolis are two famous landmarks in Athens, Greece.

Variation(s): landmark

route, n. A way to get from one place to another place


Example: We looked at the map to find the fastest route into town.

Variation(s): routes

venture, n. A business activity where a successful result is uncertain

Example: Opening an indoor ice park in our town is a new venture for my neighbors.

Variation(s): ventures

<i>At a Glance</i>	Exercise	Materials	Minutes
<i>Introducing the Read-Aloud</i>	What Have We Already Learned?		10
	Personal Connections		
	Purpose for Listening		
<i>Presenting the Read-Aloud</i>	The Pony Express	U.S. map	15
<i>Discussing the Read-Aloud</i>	Comprehension Questions		10
	Word Work: Endurance		5
 Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day			
<i>Extensions</i>	Timeline	Image Card 11; timeline from previous lessons	20
	On Stage	two labeled envelopes	
	Westward Expansion Quilt	Instructional Master 7B-1; drawing tools	



The Pony Express

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Introducing the Read-Aloud

10 minutes

What Have We Already Learned?

Remind students that they have been learning about the movement of people to the western frontier. Have students recall some of the ways that people traveled westward. (steamboat, Erie Canal, covered wagon) Ask students to share what they have learned about these forms of transportation. You may prompt discussion with the following questions:

- Why were people like Robert Fulton continually being innovative and designing new means of transportation?
- What were the advantages and disadvantages of traveling by steamboat, on the Erie Canal, or in a covered wagon?
- How did steamboats, the Erie Canal, and covered wagons increase westward expansion?

Personal Connections

Ask students to share how they communicate with family members and friends who live far away. Ask students if these forms of communication take a long time or a short time. Explain that many of these forms of communication had not been invented in the 1800s during the time of westward expansion.

The setting for this story is also in the mid-1800s, when many people were heading west to start a new life. (Using a U.S. map, point to California and the western states like Utah and Nevada, and then point to the East Coast.) What western territory have you learned about?

Purpose for Listening

Share the title of today's read-aloud. Ask the students if they know what the word *express* means. Explain that *express* means to write

or talk about something, but it also means to do something really quickly.

Tell students to listen carefully to determine the main topic of the read-aloud and to learn about how the Pony Express helped people communicate with each other during westward expansion.



The Pony Express

◀ Show image 7A-1: Mail stage coach circa 1850

- 1 And, of course, there were no computers or cell phones.

In the 1850s, mail delivery was not as fast as it is today. Airplanes had not yet been invented, and neither had cars.¹ Railroads had been invented, but the railroad tracks did not run all the way across the country.

- 2 [Point to Missouri on the U.S. map.]

Suppose you wanted to send a letter from New York to California over a hundred and fifty years ago. The railroads could carry your letter from New York to Missouri. That might take a day or two. But the train tracks ended in Missouri.² There your letter would have to be loaded onto a stagecoach like the one shown here. The stagecoach would be pulled by a team of horses. It would bump along dirt roads at five or six miles an hour.³ It would take almost a month for the stagecoach to carry your letter to California.⁴

- 3 Do you think they may have traveled on the Oregon Trail?
- 4 Can you imagine a time when it took months to communicate with friends and family? Things are very different now, aren't they?

In 1860 three businessmen came up with an idea. They thought people would be willing to pay extra to send a letter if there were a quicker way to deliver it. All they needed to do was to find a way to speed up delivery time.



◀ Show image 7A-2: Pony Express rider on his horse

- 5 [Students who participated in CKLA in first grade should remember the Inca runners from *Early American Civilizations*.]

The idea they came up with was simple. They would have riders carry the mail on horseback and run a sort of relay race from Missouri to California.⁵ They figured that a single rider on a fast horse could travel very fast. He could go much faster than a stagecoach loaded with passengers and luggage. They knew that horses and riders would get tired, so the businessmen decided there would have to be rest stations along the way.

- 6 A venture is an uncertain business project or activity. So the men were not sure the Pony Express would succeed. Do you think the Pony Express will be successful?

The Pony Express was not an easy **venture** to start.⁶ The businessmen who started it had to spend a lot of money to get things set up before they could make any money. They hoped the U.S. government would support them and pay them to be official carriers of the U.S. mail, but there were no guarantees.



← **Show image 7A-3: Fast horses running**

7 The route is the way you go to get somewhere.

After they decided which roads and trails to use, they had to set up stations along the **route**.⁷ One rider left from California in the West, at the same time another rider left from Missouri. So riders traveled from both ends of the route to carry the mail as fast as possible.

8 So what does *endurance* mean?

9 Do you think being a Pony Express rider would be an easy job or difficult and dangerous?

Finally, they had to hire riders and buy fast horses for them to ride. The horses were chosen for their **endurance**, or for their speed and their ability to continue on for a very long time.⁸ Riders were usually young men, eighteen years old or younger. They had to be tough and loyal.⁹ Riders would ride a leg, or small section, of this route, changing horses at each station.



← **Show image 7A-4: Map showing the start of the Pony Express route**

10 [Trace the red line with your finger.] This is the route the riders took to carry the mail.

11 A landmark is something in the landscape that can be used as a guiding point. [You may want to share a local landmark as an example.]

This map shows the whole route of the Pony Express. It started in St. Joseph, Missouri, where the train tracks ended. The Pony Express went all the way to Sacramento, California.¹⁰

The thick red line on the map shows the route the riders followed. The pictures above and below the route show some **landmarks** the riders rode past.¹¹



← **Show image 7A-5: Conditions that riders had to endure**

12 Why do you think boys chose to be Pony Express riders when it was such a hazardous job?

13 What Native American tribe did you learn about that had their land taken away from them?

Pony Express riders had to be ready to jump into the saddle and ride fifty miles on a moment's notice. They rode in the scorching heat of the day. They rode at night, by the light of the moon. They rode through rain, hail, and sleet. They galloped across dusty deserts and zigzagged up dangerous mountain paths. They rode across wide-open prairie and through large herds of buffalo. There are stories of riders becoming lost in fierce blizzards and having to lead their horses on foot.¹² Native Americans watched these riders and saw it as more evidence of an endless flow of people moving onto their land.¹³

14 What were some of the dangers that the Pony Express riders might encounter? (bad weather, terrain, buffalo, or wolves)



Not only did a rider have to worry about himself, he had to worry about his horse, too. Because the terrain was so varied, a horse could stumble and fall. Or it could be spooked by wolves or stampeding herds of buffalo.¹⁴

← **Show image 7A-6: Pony Express station in Kansas**

Here is a photo of a Pony Express station that is still standing today. There were more than one hundred fifty stations like this one along the route. The stations were located about ten miles apart. That was about as far as a horse could gallop before getting tired.

They made swing stations, where a rider could exchange his tired horse for a fresh one and then continue on the trail. They also had home stations, where riders could stay and rest while another rider carried the mail to the next station. The riders waited at their home station until it was time to return with the mail that another rider had delivered.

If all went well, this is what would happen: A Pony Express rider would come galloping up. He would jump off his horse. Another rider would be standing in front of the station holding a new horse. The new rider would unhitch the mail pouches from the old horse and hitch them to his horse. Then he would jump on his horse and gallop away. The rider who had just completed his part of the journey would be fed a simple meal of bacon and beans. If he was lucky there would be some cornbread, too. Then he would get some much-needed rest.

15 Do you think this might be why the riders were young boys instead of grown men?



Both riders and station masters tried to save as much time as possible and to be as fast as possible in order to get mail to settlers quickly. The horse could move faster if it carried less weight.¹⁵

← **Show image 7A-7: Pony Express station in Utah**

Here is a picture of another Pony Express station. This one is called Simpson Springs. It is located in Utah. You can see that this station is surrounded by a desert, and there are mountains rising



up in the distance. Can you imagine how hot it could be riding across the desert during the day, and how cold it could be at night? And of course the rider would be moving in a cloud of dust.

◀ **Show image 7A-8: Pony Express advertisement**

The men who created the Pony Express were businessmen, and their goal was to make money. They wanted to make sure everybody knew about the service they were providing, so they made posters and ads like this one. It cost \$5 to mail a letter via the Pony Express, which is the same as \$130 today.

In 1860, the American writer Mark Twain took a trip across the United States. He was traveling by stagecoach, but he and his fellow travelers kept an eye out for the Pony Express. In his book, *Roughing It*, Twain described his first sight of the Pony Express:

“We had had a consuming desire . . . to see a pony-rider. But somehow or other all that passed us . . . managed to streak by in the night . . .

We heard only a whiz and a hail. The swift phantom of the desert was gone before we could get our heads out of the windows . . .

But presently the driver exclaims: “HERE HE COMES!” Every neck is stretched further. Every eye strained wider. Away across the endless dead level of the prairie a black speck appears against the sky . . .

In a second or two it becomes a horse and rider, rising and falling, rising and falling—sweeping toward us nearer and nearer—growing more and more distinct, more and more sharply defined—nearer and still nearer. A flutter of hoofs comes faintly to the ear. In another instant there is a whoop and a hurrah from our upper deck, a wave of the rider’s hand, but no reply. Then man and horse burst past our excited faces, and go winging away like a belated fragment of a storm!”



← **Show image 7A-9: Pony Express rider and telegraph poles**

16 Why do you think people chose to use the Pony Express even though it was very expensive?

17 Do you see the Pony Express rider? Can you tell what the other men in the picture are doing?

18 A telegraph is a machine that can send messages over a series of wires in minutes.

19 Since the telegraph was both a faster and safer way to communicate, people no longer needed the Pony Express.

Mark Twain was not the only person who was excited about the Pony Express. Lots of people used the Pony Express to send letters.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the Pony Express did not last very long. This picture can help you understand why.¹⁷

The men on the ground and behind the Pony Express rider are setting up telegraph poles. Once the telegraph lines stretched across the country, it changed things.¹⁸ People in New York could send telegraph messages to California. A telegraph message could travel from New York to California in a matter of minutes. There was no way the Pony Express could compete with that. The Pony Express went out of business in 1861, after only eighteen months of service.¹⁹



← **Show image 7A-10: Pony Express rider monument**

20 In fact, we are still learning about it more than 150 years later!

21 [Point to the picture.] Do you see the rectangles on the side of the saddle? Those are the pouches where the mail was kept.

Although the Pony Express did not last long, people still remember the can-do spirit of the founders and the bravery of the riders who carried the mail.²⁰ This statue of a Pony Express rider carrying mail helps us remember this significant event in American history.²¹

Discussing the Read-Aloud

15 minutes

Comprehension Questions

10 minutes

1. *Evaluative* What was the main topic of the read-aloud? (the Pony Express)
2. *Literal* What was the Pony Express? (an overland way to send mail from Missouri to California)
3. *Inferential* Why did three businessmen decide to start the Pony Express venture? (They thought they could make money by delivering the mail to the West Coast faster than what had been done previously by steamship.)
4. *Literal* Who carried the mail on the Pony Express, and how did they travel the route from Missouri to California? (Young men carried the mail using horses as their means of transportation.)

5. *Inferential* Why were the young men who carried the mail required to be small? (so the horses could go faster) What special characteristics did the horses chosen for the Pony Express need? (The horses had to be fast and have great endurance.)
6. *Inferential* Was the route for the Pony Express riders hazardous or safe? (hazardous) Why? (unexpected and extreme weather, wild animals, rough landscape, horses could stumble and fall, etc.)
7. *Literal* How was mail carried along the Pony Express? Did one rider carry the mail the whole way? (No, mail was carried relay-style, with riders taking certain legs, or sections, of the journey. The riders would pass off the mail to another rider at one of the many stations.)
8. *Literal* How did the Pony Express riders know where to go? (They rode a set trail and used landmarks to guide them.)
9. *Evaluative* Was the Pony Express venture successful? (The Pony Express was successful for eighteen months, or a year and a half.) Why was the Pony Express only used for eighteen months? (The telegraph line was completed and people could send messages across the country in a matter of minutes.)

[Please continue to model the *Think Pair Share* process for students, as necessary, and scaffold students in their use of the process.]

I am going to ask a question. I will give you a minute to think about the question, and then I will ask you to turn to your neighbor and discuss the question. Finally, I will call on several of you to share what you discussed with your partner.

10. *Evaluative Think Pair Share:* The Pony Express only lasted eighteen months before the telegraph made it easier, cheaper, safer, and faster to communicate from coast to coast. Why do you think people still remember and talk about the Pony Express, even though it existed for such a short time? (Answers may vary.)
11. After hearing today's read-aloud and questions and answers, do you have any remaining questions? [If time permits, you may wish to allow for individual, group, or class research of the text and/or other resources to answer these questions.]

Word Work: Endurance

5 minutes

1. In the read-aloud you heard, “Finally, [the businessmen who started the Pony Express] had to hire riders and buy fast horses with great *endurance* for them to ride.”
2. Say the word *endurance* with me.
3. Endurance is the ability to go on for a long time despite discomfort or pain.
4. The students needed great endurance to run around the track in gym.
5. Can you think of times when you had to have endurance? Try to use the word *endurance* when you tell about it. [Ask two or three students. If necessary, guide and/or rephrase students’ responses: “I had to have endurance when . . . ”]
6. What’s the word we’ve been talking about? What part of speech is the word *endurance*?

Use a *Making Choices* activity for follow-up. Directions: I am going to read several sentences. If I describe someone who is demonstrating endurance, or is continuing on despite discomfort, say, “That shows endurance.” If I describe someone who is not demonstrating endurance, say, “That does not show endurance.”

1. Even though his legs were tired, Derek pushed on to finish the race. (That shows endurance.)
2. Kay waited for her puppy to rest at the bottom of the hill before continuing on their walk. (That does not show endurance.)
3. The pony outran the growling coyotes for many miles. (That shows endurance.)
4. Lewis and Clark kept going even when they could not find an all-water route to the West Coast. (That shows endurance.)
5. Francis slept in on Saturday because he wasn’t feeling well. (That does not show endurance.)



Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day



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Extensions

20 minute

Timeline

Quickly review what was placed on the timeline in the previous lessons. Show students Image Card 11 (Pony Express). Explain that the Pony Express was used during 1860 and 1861, which was after many people had moved to the West on the Oregon Trail. Ask students where the Image Card should be placed on the timeline, and then place it to the right of the image of the Oregon Trail. Save the timeline for use in later lessons.

On Stage

Note: You may choose to do this exercise in the classroom or outside in a larger space. You will also need to prepare two envelopes that say the following: “To: The East Coast; From: The West Coast” and “To: The West Coast; From: The East Coast.”

Tell students that you are going to read some key parts of the read-aloud “The Pony Express,” and this time students will act out the story of the Pony Express. Ask students what characters will be needed. (the three businessmen who formed the Pony Express, the riders of the Pony Express, the station masters) Then designate students to be various characters, with the majority of students acting as riders and station masters.

Ask students from which state the westbound rider will leave. (Missouri) Designate an area to be Missouri. Then ask from which state the eastbound rider will leave. (California) Designate an area to be California. Designate areas in between to be stations along the route. As you reread parts of the read-aloud, have students act as riders and station masters. Provide the rider starting out from California with the envelope that says, “From: The West Coast” and the rider starting out from Missouri with the envelope that says, “From: The East Coast.”

As you read, encourage the “characters” to listen carefully to know what actions to use. Also, talk about using facial expressions to show how the characters are feeling. You may also have students create some of their own dialogue to go along with the story, as well as having them stop at various stations to switch horses. Encourage students to use in their dialogue the vocabulary learned in this lesson whenever possible.

Westward Expansion Quilt (Instructional Master 7B-1)

Remind students that they have been making quilt squares to remember some of the important things they learn about westward expansion. Ask students to share some of their quilt squares from previous lessons. Then, have students recall important details from the read-aloud about the Pony Express. You may prompt discussion with the following questions:

- What was the Pony Express?
- Why did three businessmen start this venture?
- Why was the Pony Express route from Missouri to California?
- Was being a Pony Express rider easy or hazardous?

Remind students that first they should cut out the quilt square. Next, they should draw a picture representing the main topic of the read-aloud in the center diamond. (the Pony Express) Then, they should write a word or short phrase in each corner, sharing facts learned about the Pony Express. Next, ask students to write a sentence on the back of the quilt square, using one or more of the words they’ve written. Finally, students should share their drawing and writing with a partner.

Save these quilt squares for making the complete quilts at a later time.