

The Pony Express

The story of the Pony Express, which carried mail between Missouri and California, is a famous chapter in the early days of Western History. The pony express riders were a group of young men who were hired to carry the mail by horseback across much of the country. The daring deeds of this small group of riders will long be remembered. The Pony Express service began April 3, 1860, and ended on October 24, 1861. It lasted about 18 months or until the telegraph line was completed. The trail stretched from St. Joseph Missouri, to Sacramento California. The horses galloped across a distance of almost 2,000 miles. Scattered over these miles, there were about 190 relay stations, where every 10 to 20 miles the rider would stop to change horses. At a home station, anywhere from 45 to 85 miles apart, a new rider would take the mail and continue the journey.

California became a state in 1850. It was many thousands of miles away from the east coast of the United States. There were not many people in between. There was a big problem with sending messages between the east to the west. Stagecoaches carried passengers and mail over this great distance. It took them 3 weeks, traveling mostly day and night, to make the journey. The Pony Express Riders covered 250 miles a day. This distance was twice as far as a day's travel by stage.

By 1860 there were over 500,000 white settlers living west of the Rocky Mountains. As the population grew, a faster mail service was needed. A large freighting firm call Russell, Majors, and Waddell, started the Pony Express, hoping to win a government contract to carry the U.S. Mail. Two riders started their first ride on the same day, which was April 3, 1860. Johnny Fry left from St. Joseph Missouri heading west, while the second rider, Billy Hamilton, left Sacramento, California riding east.

It is estimated that about 100 riders were hired for the Pony Express. They were mostly young, skinny, hardy, and daring. An advertisement for riders in one newspaper described the kind of men the company was looking for: " Young, skinny, wiry fellows anxious for adventure and chance to see our great West. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily." They were paid well, up to \$100 a month.

Day # 1 Activities:

Show the advertisement used to encourage riders to sign up as a Pony Express Rider, or make a copy for each child. Then have them make their own advertisement. Ask them to think about these questions: What kind of riders would you want to hire? What would you say to make them want to take this dangerous job? On their own paper, have them create an advertisement that would make a young man be interested in taking this important job.



PONY EXPRESS

St. JOSEPH, MISSOURI to CALIFORNIA
in 10 days or less.

➔ **WANTED** ➔

YOUNG, SKINNY, WIRY FELLOWS
not over eighteen. Must be expert
riders, willing to risk death daily.

Orphans preferred.
Wages \$25 per week.

APPLY, PONY EXPRESS STABLES
St. JOSEPH, MISSOURI