Explain Events, Procedures, and Ideas

Grade 4 Reading Worksheet

Name _____ Date _____

Read the text. Circle the answer to each Why question.

READ THIS FIRST

The Telegraph Outruns the Pony Express

In 1860, news traveled across the United States very slowly. California had become a state ten years earlier, but it was far from the cities of the East. A letter could take weeks to arrive by ship or stagecoach. People in California wanted faster news.

In April 1860, a company started the Pony Express. It was a relay of riders on fast horses. A rider carried a leather pouch of mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, toward Sacramento, California. Every ten to fifteen miles, he stopped at a station and jumped onto a fresh horse. After about seventy-five miles, he handed the pouch to a new rider. Because fresh horses and riders kept taking over, the mail moved day and night. A letter could cross nearly 2,000 miles in about ten days.

People cheered the riders. Yet even as they rode, a faster idea was spreading. The telegraph sent messages as electric signals along metal wires. An operator tapped a key to send short and long clicks, called Morse code. At the other end, another operator turned the clicks back into words. A message could travel hundreds of miles in seconds. However, telegraph lines did not yet cross the West.

In 1860, the government offered money to build a line all the way to California. In the summer of 1861, two crews began working from opposite directions. One started in Nebraska and built west. The other started in the far West and built east. The crews dug holes, set up thousands of wooden poles and strung wire between them.

On October 24, 1861, the two lines met in Salt Lake City. For the first time, a message could cross the country in minutes instead of days.

Two days later, the Pony Express stopped carrying mail. It had lasted only about a year and a half. The riders were fast, but no horse could keep up with electricity.

The Pony Express is still remembered for its daring riders. The telegraph, though, changed how Americans shared news. It connected the country in a way that horses never could.

1. Before October 1861, why couldn't the telegraph send a message from Missouri to California?

   The Pony Express owned all the wires.

   Signals could only travel a few miles.

   No telegraph line stretched across the West yet.

   Morse code had not been invented yet.

2. Why did the Pony Express stop carrying mail?

The riders refused to cross the mountains.

The telegraph could send news far faster.

The horses grew too tired to run.

The trail to Sacramento was closed.

3. Why did people in California want faster news?

Letters from the East could take weeks to arrive.

There were no riders to carry mail in the West.

The telegraph lines kept breaking in the winter.

Ships had stopped carrying letters to the West.

4. Why did the government offer money in 1860?

to buy fresh horses for every station along the trail

to get a telegraph line built all the way to California

to pay the Pony Express riders to ride even faster

to help ships carry the mail to California sooner

Scan to get this marked free. No screen time for your child.
Print it · do it in pencil · scan it · PencilGo picks the next sheet.

Explain Events, Procedures, and Ideas

Answer Key - Grade 4 Reading Worksheet

Read the text. Circle the answer to each Why question.

READ THIS FIRST

The Telegraph Outruns the Pony Express

In 1860, news traveled across the United States very slowly. California had become a state ten years earlier, but it was far from the cities of the East. A letter could take weeks to arrive by ship or stagecoach. People in California wanted faster news.

In April 1860, a company started the Pony Express. It was a relay of riders on fast horses. A rider carried a leather pouch of mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, toward Sacramento, California. Every ten to fifteen miles, he stopped at a station and jumped onto a fresh horse. After about seventy-five miles, he handed the pouch to a new rider. Because fresh horses and riders kept taking over, the mail moved day and night. A letter could cross nearly 2,000 miles in about ten days.

People cheered the riders. Yet even as they rode, a faster idea was spreading. The telegraph sent messages as electric signals along metal wires. An operator tapped a key to send short and long clicks, called Morse code. At the other end, another operator turned the clicks back into words. A message could travel hundreds of miles in seconds. However, telegraph lines did not yet cross the West.

In 1860, the government offered money to build a line all the way to California. In the summer of 1861, two crews began working from opposite directions. One started in Nebraska and built west. The other started in the far West and built east. The crews dug holes, set up thousands of wooden poles and strung wire between them.

On October 24, 1861, the two lines met in Salt Lake City. For the first time, a message could cross the country in minutes instead of days.

Two days later, the Pony Express stopped carrying mail. It had lasted only about a year and a half. The riders were fast, but no horse could keep up with electricity.

The Pony Express is still remembered for its daring riders. The telegraph, though, changed how Americans shared news. It connected the country in a way that horses never could.

1. Before October 1861, why couldn't the telegraph send a message from Missouri to California?

   The Pony Express owned all the wires.

   Signals could only travel a few miles.

   No telegraph line stretched across the West yet.

   Morse code had not been invented yet.

2. Why did the Pony Express stop carrying mail?

The riders refused to cross the mountains.

The telegraph could send news far faster.

The horses grew too tired to run.

The trail to Sacramento was closed.

3. Why did people in California want faster news?

Letters from the East could take weeks to arrive.

There were no riders to carry mail in the West.

The telegraph lines kept breaking in the winter.

Ships had stopped carrying letters to the West.

4. Why did the government offer money in 1860?

to buy fresh horses for every station along the trail

to get a telegraph line built all the way to California

to pay the Pony Express riders to ride even faster

to help ships carry the mail to California sooner