

Greetings From America

Lesson Four

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THE UNITED STATES POST OFFICE: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Objectives

- Students will describe what happens to a letter once it's mailed
- Students will name three facts about the Pony Express
- Students will actively participate in a Pony Express Readers Theatre

Materials

- *In My Neighborhood: Postal Workers* by Paulette Bourgeois and Kim LaFave
- Chart paper
- Multiple copies of the Pony Express Readers Theatre
- Self-adhesive note paper

Set Induction

Grand Conversation: What happens to a letter after you've mailed it? Create a KWL chart. Under the (K) write what students think they already know about mail delivery. Under (W) write what they wonder about or want to know. As you complete the lesson activities, record what the students (L) learned.

Activity One

Read aloud *In My Neighborhood: Postal Workers* by Paulette Bourgeois and Kim LaFave. Distribute self-adhesive note paper to students. As you read the story, students write down facts they have learned about mail delivery. Record this information on the KWL chart: (W)What do they want to learn more about? (L) What did they learn? If a copy of this book is unavailable, invite a postal worker to visit your class.

Activity Two

Introduction: How do you think mail was delivered over 100 years ago? Discuss modes of transportation and environmental obstacles mail carriers might have faced back then. Introduce the concept of the Pony Express by distributing copies of the Readers Theatre play.

Presentation: Read through the Pony Express Readers Theatre script as a whole class. Discuss the historical elements of the play. Then divide students into cooperative groups. Assign parts and provide practice time. Students perform the play as a Readers Theatre. Using the Readers Theatre approach, students do not memorize parts, there are few props and no staging.

Readers' Theatre: The Pony Express

Narrator 1: It is April, 1860. The place is California.

Daughter: What's wrong, Mama?

Mother: California sure is a beautiful place! But I miss home. I wish I knew how your Grandma is doing back in Missouri.

Daughter: Why don't you write her a letter?

Mother: I have. I wrote her a big letter as we traveled all the way through the wilderness in our covered wagon, and I mailed it as soon as we got here. But it sure is taking a long time to hear back from her.

Daughter: How does it get all the way back to Grandma's?

Mother: Well, you know there aren't any trains west of St. Joseph, and you know how far we came, over prairies, mountains, and deserts! When they send the mail by stagecoach they say it takes at least three or four weeks, and by boat at least a month. I wish I could make sure Grandma knows we made it out here safe and sound.

Daughter: Can't you send her a telegram?

Mother: There aren't any telegraph wires across that wilderness! Nothing but a few forts and small settlements all across that big country! I sure wish someone would do something!

Narrator: Someone *was* doing something about it. At that very minute, the first Pony Express rider was leaving St. Joseph, Missouri, with forty-nine letters, five telegrams, and some newspapers. At stations all along the way, people eagerly waited to see the Pony Express riders. Here we are in Deep Creek, Utah.

Girl in Deep Creek: What is that crowd of people gathering over there? What is going on?

Boy in Deep Creek: That's the Pony Express relay station. Everybody's waiting for the first rider to come in.

Girl: Is that all?

Boy: Is that *all*? The Pony Express riders are going to get the mail from St. Joseph, Missouri all the way to California in ten days! Each rider will ride hard for hours, changing horses every fifteen to twenty miles, and might ride as much as 100 miles in a day!

Girl: Wow! Let's go talk to the rider. I'll bet he has exciting stories to tell!

Boy: No way! He's not even going to stop! He'll jump from the tired horse to the new horse and keep going! They say the pony express riders are the best riders and the bravest men there are!

Group of citizens: Here he comes! Here comes the Pony Express! Bring out his horse!

Boy: Wow, did you see the way he jumped off that horse and threw his saddlebags on the new horse without even stopping? I want to be a Pony Express rider!

Narrator: There were between 80 and 100 Pony Express riders in all, and it is said that the youngest was eleven years old!

Mr. Egan: Well, son, we've seen what a good horseman you are, and these gentleman here tell us you are brave and dependable. Now, all you need to do is take the Oath and you will be an official Pony Express rider! Repeat after me: I, Billy Fisher, do hereby swear

Boy: I, Billy Fisher, do hereby swear

Mr. Egan: that I will not curse, drink, or fight and that I will be honest.

Boy: that I will not curse, drink, or fight and that I will be honest.

Group of Citizens: Hurray!

Narrator: But after only a year and a half, the Pony Express came to an end. In October, 1861, the transcontinental telegraph was complete, linking the East Coast of the United States with the West Coast by telegraph wire. People didn't need the Pony Express anymore, and the young riders delivered the last mail in November of that year.

Extension

- To find out more about the Pony Express, visit the Pony Express Home Station at <http://www.xphomestation.com/frm-history.html>
- Create a new way to deliver mail to a jungle, island, mountaintop, or outer space.