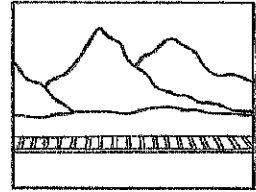# THE FIRST TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD

The First Transcontinental Railroad was built between 1863 and 1869. It stretched 1,912 miles across the United States from the East to West Coast. To travel across the country before, people had to take long wagon trains for months before they reached California. With the Transcontinental Railroad, people could travel faster, safer, and cheaper. Items such as mail, supplies, and trade goods could be shipped across the nation in just a few days.

HISTORY

People began talking about building a transcontinental railroad around 1830. Asa Whitney, a merchant, was one of the first promoters of the line across the country. He tried, unsuccessfully, to urge Congress to pass an act to build the railroad. In the 1860s Theodore Judah lobbied for a railroad. He surveyed the Sierra Nevada Mountains and located a pass where the railroad could be built.

ROUTE

There were two main routes where people wanted the railroad to be built. The "central route" followed much of the same route as the Oregon Trail. It began in Omaha, Nebraska and ended in Sacramento, California. The "southern route" stretched across Texas, New Mexico, and ended in Los Angeles, California. The central route was chosen by Congress.

PACIFIC RAILROAD ACT

President Abraham Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act into law in 1862. The act stated there would be two main lines paid for by the United States government. The railroad took $50 million dollars to build. The Central Pacific Railroad would come from California, while the Union Pacific Railroad would come from the Midwest and meet somewhere in the middle.

CONSTRUCTION

Building the transcontinental railroad was tough work. The weather conditions in the mountains during winter were especially difficult. Often the only way to travel was to blast a tunnel through the mountains. The Central Pacific Railroad blasted several tunnels through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The longest tunnel was 1,659 feet. The tunnels took a long time to build, as they were only able to blast about one foot per day. The Union Pacific Railroad encountered indigenous Americans who were not open to the life the "Iron Horse" was going to bring. They started raiding railroad work sites. A lot of the land "granted" to the railroad by the government was indigenous Americans land.
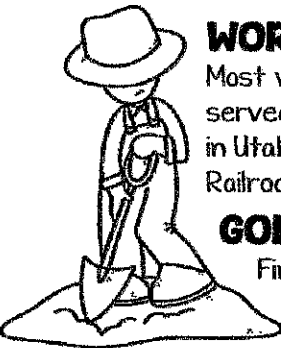
WORKERS

Most workers on the Union Pacific Railroad were Irish laborers, many of whom had served in both the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War. Much of the track in Utah was built by Mormons. Chinese immigrants built most of the Central Pacific Railroad.

GOLDEN SPIKE

Finally, on May 10, 1869, the two railroads met at Promontory Summit, Utah. The governor of California and president of the Central Pacific Railroad drove the last spike into the track. This spike was known as the "Golden Spike" or "Final Spike." It was replaced with an iron spike after the ceremony. The golden spike is now on display at Stanford University in California. The Central Pacific Railroad connected San Francisco to Sacramento in November of 1869.

IMPACT

The transcontinental railroad reduced the time it took to get across the United States from six months to six days. The railroad was also much cheaper. Before, it cost around $1,000 to go coast to coast, but the railroad was only around $150. The railroad replaced the Pony Express, wagon trains, and stagecoach lines. It opened the west for rapid settlement, changing the United States dramatically.

Name _____

TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD

MATCHING: Match each term with its description.

|	
1. _____ tunnels	A. Immigrants who worked on the railroad
2. _____ Sierra Nevada	B. The railroad ended in this state
3. _____ Lincoln	C. Name given to the railroad by indigenous people
4. _____ Whitney	D. Mountain range the railroad went through
5. _____ golden	E. President who approved the railroad
6. _____ Chinese	F. Early promoter of the railroad
7. _____ Iron Horse	G. Final spike in the Transcontinental Railroad
8. _____ California	H. Blasted through the mountains

TRUE OR FALSE? Place a check in the correct column.

STATEMENT	T	F
9. Asa Whitney successfully campaigned for the railroad.		
10. The southern route ended in San Francisco, California.		
11. Congress chose the Central Route for the railroad.		
12. The transcontinental railroad took $50 million to build.		
13. Passengers could travel across the U.S. in two days.		
14. Prior to the railroad, people traveled in stagecoaches.		
15. The railroad was financed by individual investors.		
16. Indigenous Americans were happy with the railroad.		
17. Theodore Judah surveyed the land for the railroad.		
18. The railroad was safer than wagon trains.		

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MULTIPLE CHOICE: Choose the best answer.

19. Which of the following best completes the analogy?
Central : Sacramento :: Southern : _____
A. San Francisco
B. Los Angeles
C. Omaha
D. Phoenix
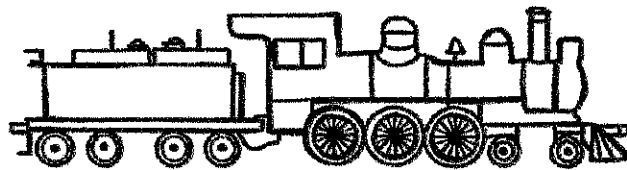
20. Which of the following was NOT an impact of the transcontinental railroad?
A. Items could be shipped much faster across the country.
B. People could travel much faster across the United States.
C. People preferred to travel in stagecoaches and wagon trains.
D. More people moved to the western United States.

21. Which best describes the Golden Spike?
A. It is still on the transcontinental railroad.
B. It was knocked in by the United States President.
C. It was stolen by natives.
D. It is now on display at Stanford University.

22. Which accurately describes workers on the Transcontinental Railroad?
A. Most were enslaved people.
B. Most in Utah were Mormons.
C. Most were Mexican immigrants.
D. Most were soldiers during the Revolutionary War.

23. Which of the following was NOT replaced by the transcontinental railroad?
A. Pony Express
B. Stagecoaches
C. Wagon Trains
D. Interstates

24. Which of the following would be the least important to include in a summary of the selection?
A. The United States government funded the building of the transcontinental railroad.
B. The transcontinental railroad opened up the western United States.
C. The golden spike is on display at Stanford
D. People could travel across the United States much faster after the transcontinental railroad was built.