

**“The Pony Express:  
Bringing the West Coast Out of Communication Isolation”**

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Junior Division – Performance Category

# Process Paper

## How I chose my topic:

In the beginning I looked at a suggested list of ideas. I liked the Pony Express for several reasons. I enjoy the 1800's time period and the Pony Express fits right in. It sounded exciting and adventurous. I didn't know there were other routes at the time and when I learned about them I was surprised at how long they took. It seemed like the West Coast was isolated and the Pony Express helped break that. I was interested in how young the riders were and could imagine myself in their position.

## How I conducted my research:

I thought about my topic during the summer and started in September looking for preliminary reading. I found a biography of Buffalo Bill Cody which had an extensive bibliography of primary sources. I also found a book called The Pony Express: the Story behind the Scenery by Anthony Godfrey and Roy Webb. This book had several quotes and newspaper articles which came in handy for writing my script. At the University of Washington Suzzallo Library, in the Special Collections section, I found a number of primary sources including books by William Russell, the founder of the Pony Express. In the Government Publications section I found hand-drawn maps by Russell and his men, a pamphlet from the US Postal Service and a land-use feasibility study.

On a family trip to Nebraska I stopped at monuments to take pictures and read the memorials. On-line I found many New York Times articles and a letter from the Committee of California to Senator William Gwin. I searched on the Library of Congress website and found several photographs of Pony Express riders. I searched the National

Archives but was unsuccessful in navigating the site. I e-mailed Tom Crews, author of a Pony Express website and a self-appointed historian, who was helpful in my script. Through him I was able to contact and interview an historical expert in the National Pony Express Association and the director of a St. Joseph museum.

### How I selected my category and created my project:

After conducting my extensive research I created an outline to point out two specific points: communication and economics. The newspaper articles fit in my script as well as quotes from riders. A letter from the Committee of California to Senator Gwin asking him for government support came in handy to make the point that his constituents wanted the Pony Express for their mail service. I decided to organize my findings in the performance category because I like drama and I am good at memorization.

### How my project relates to the theme:

My project relates to the theme because in the two years of operation it was the leading means of communication to and from California. Imagine thousands of settlers migrating from the east coast not able to contact their family or friends. The Pony Express gave a fast, easy and affordable solution to the need for a courier service. The Pony Express brought the west coast out of isolation by giving the people in the west a key to understand current events in the rest of the country and world.