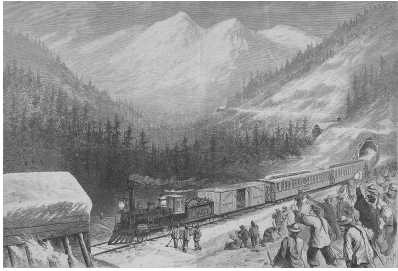


Name _____



The Transcontinental Railroad

by Sheri Skelton



Answer the following questions **BEFORE** you read this book. It is okay if you do not know as much as you thought. Do the best you can!

1. Before the transcontinental railroad, how did people travel from the East Coast to the West Coast of the United States?

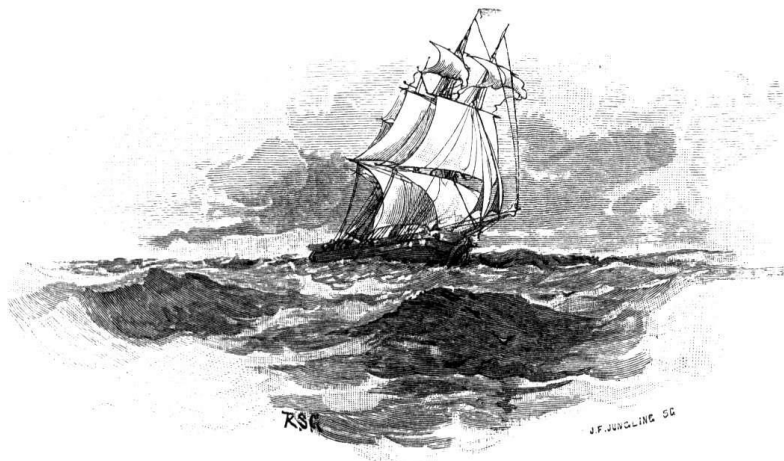
2. How did the federal government help to make the transcontinental railroad possible?

3. What were some positive effects of the transcontinental railroad?

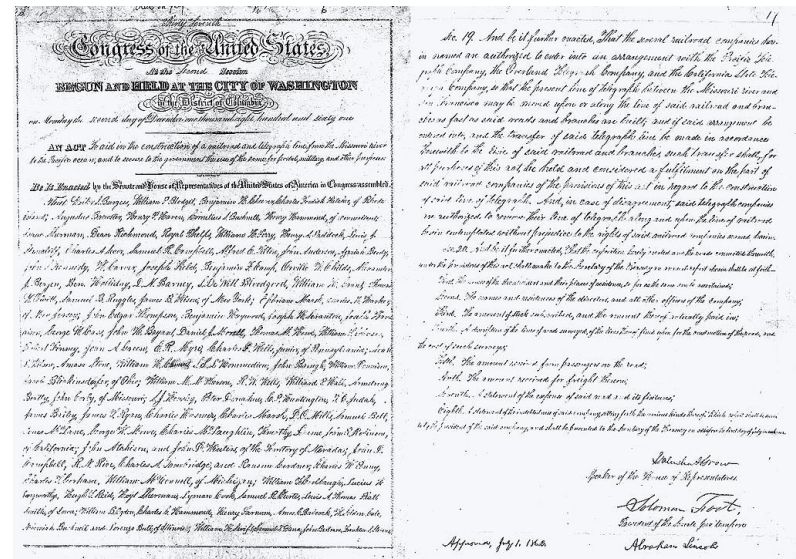


THE STAGECOACH

In the mid-1800s, going from the East Coast to the West Coast of the United States required months of traveling. The journey was expensive and often dangerous. You could travel overland by stagecoach. That route involved crossing mountainous and desert terrain. You might choose to travel by ship. One route would take you around the tip of South America. That was a journey of about 18,000 miles.

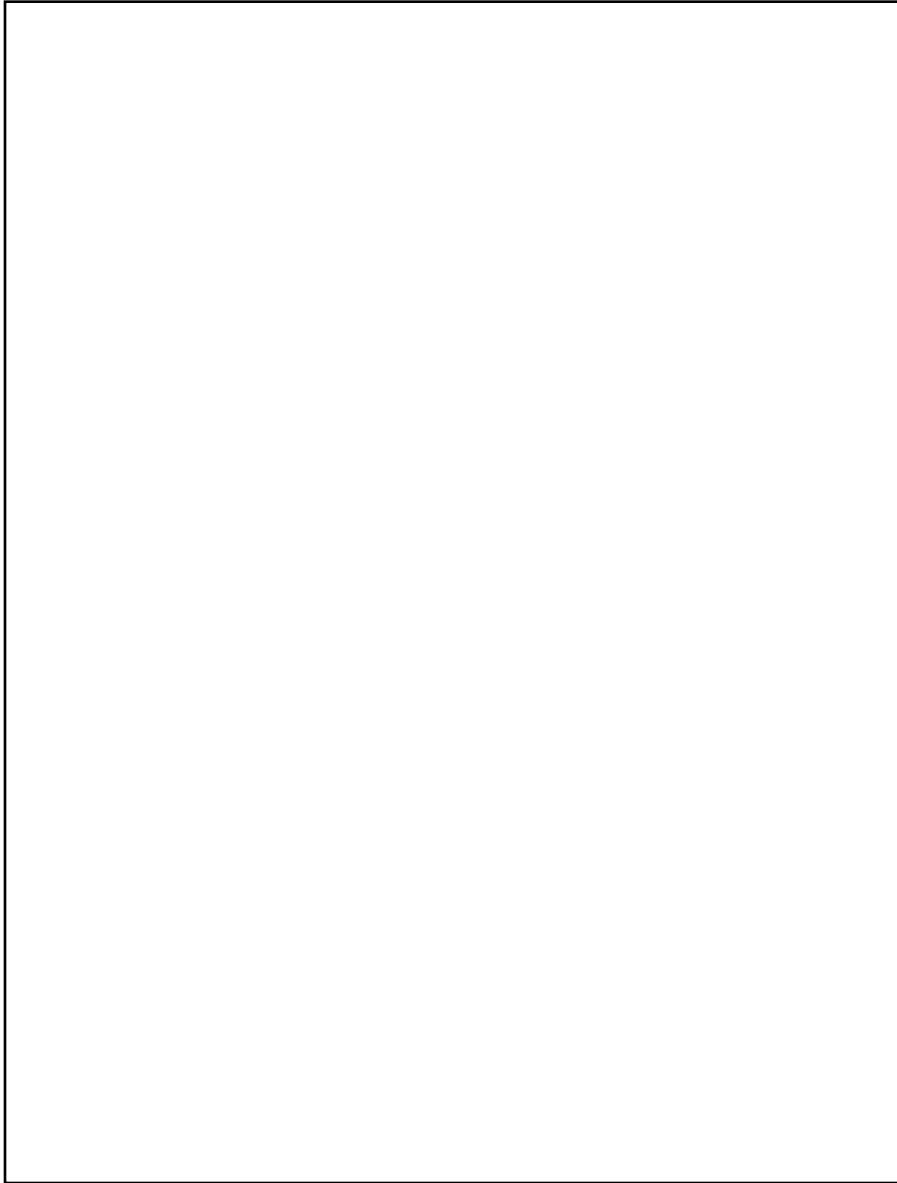


An alternative route would take you by ship to the Isthmus of Panama. From there you would travel by land to the Pacific Ocean. Then another ship would take you to California. The rapid expansion of the western part of the country required a more effective way to transport people and supplies. The country needed a transcontinental railroad.



Congress passed the Pacific Railroad Bill in 1862. The bill provided for public land and money to fund the construction of a transcontinental railroad. Two main companies would build the railroad. The Central Pacific Railroad began building at Sacramento, California. Its workers would lay track going east. The Union Pacific Railroad would lay track going west. Its workers started construction at Omaha, Nebraska.

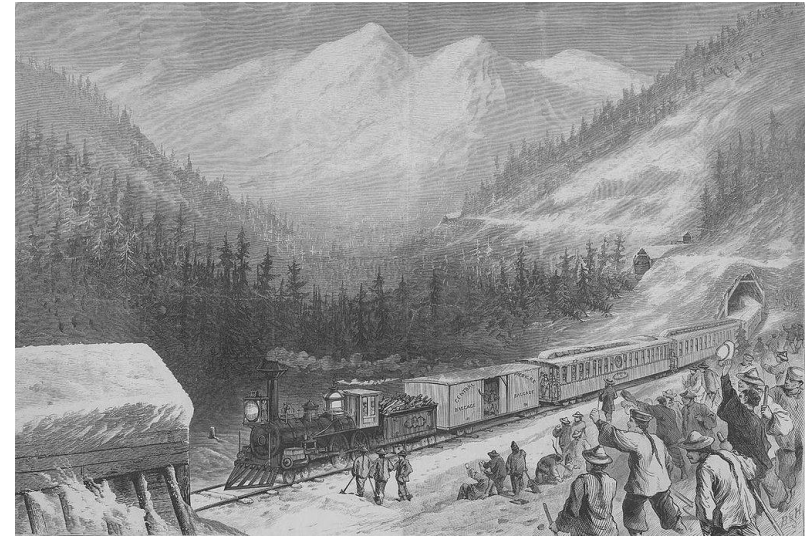
Draw a poster that one of the railroad companies might have used to recruit workers for construction of the transcontinental railroad.



Construction of the transcontinental railroad began in 1863. During the first two years, each company was required to complete 50 miles of track. In the years following, each company was required to complete 50 miles of track each year. Payment for each mile varied according to the degree of difficulty of the construction area. Building over an area with an easy grade was worth 16,000 dollars per mile. In the high plains, the payment was 32,000 dollars per mile. Construction in the mountains paid 48,000 dollars per mile.



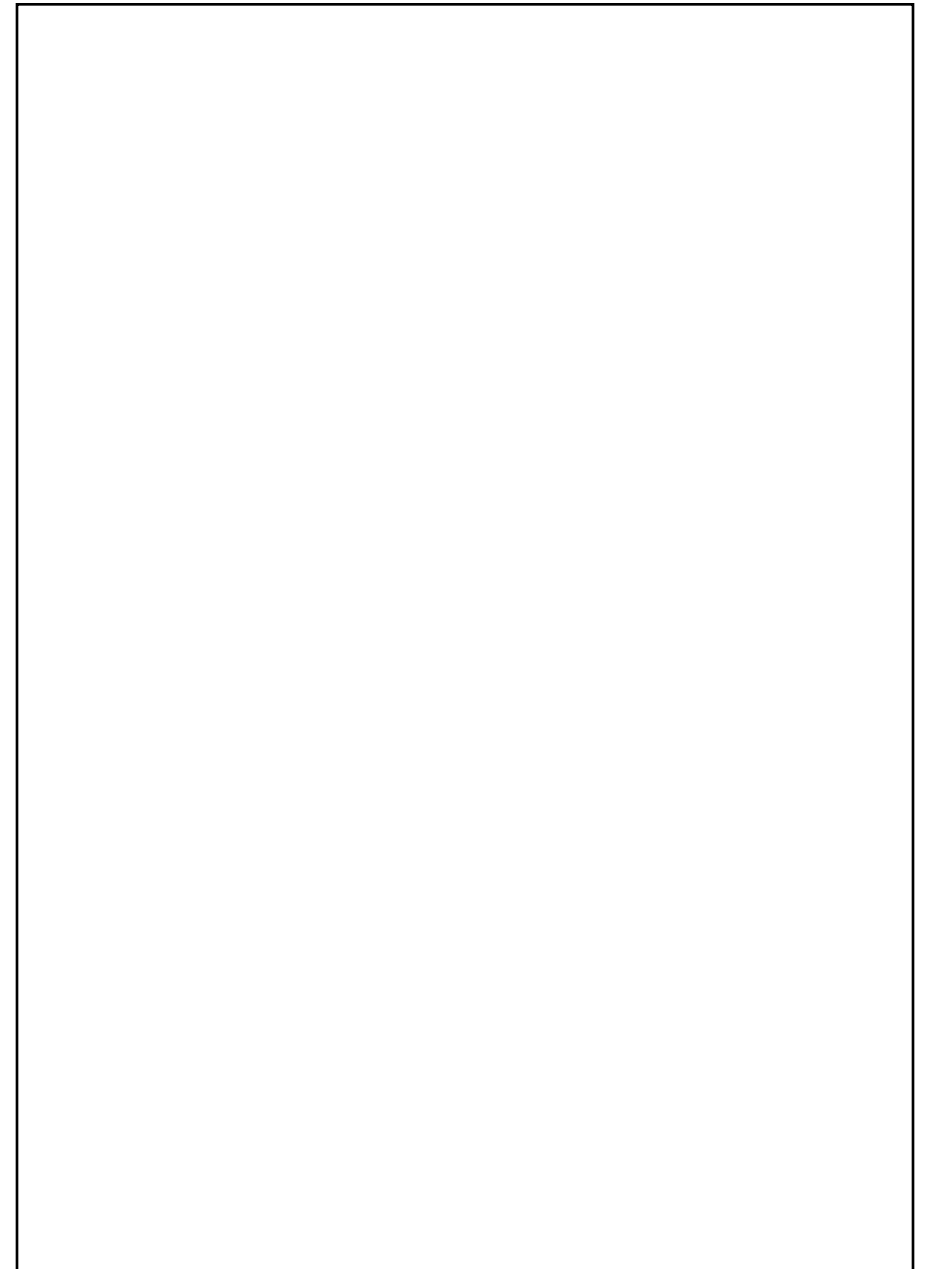
The companies received payments in the form of government bonds. Companies also received millions of acres in federal land grants. For each mile of track built, a company was given a right-of-way of 400 feet. The company also received 10 square miles of land adjacent to the track. Both railroad companies sold the government bonds to raise money. The companies sold the land to settlers. The money raised was used for financing the railroad's construction.



Building the eastward segment of the railroad was difficult and dangerous. The track had to be laid through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Much of the work was done by Chinese immigrants. They were actively recruited. They were hard workers. They were also willing to work for lower wages. Three shifts of laborers worked around the clock.



Draw a picture of workers packing explosives into holes in the mountain.



Workers were lowered in baskets down the side of the mountain. The men drilled blasting holes into the rock by hand. They packed explosives into the holes. Progress on the tunnels was extremely slow. The forward movement averaged one foot per day. Hundreds of workers were killed during the construction. They died from explosions, freezing temperatures, and avalanches.



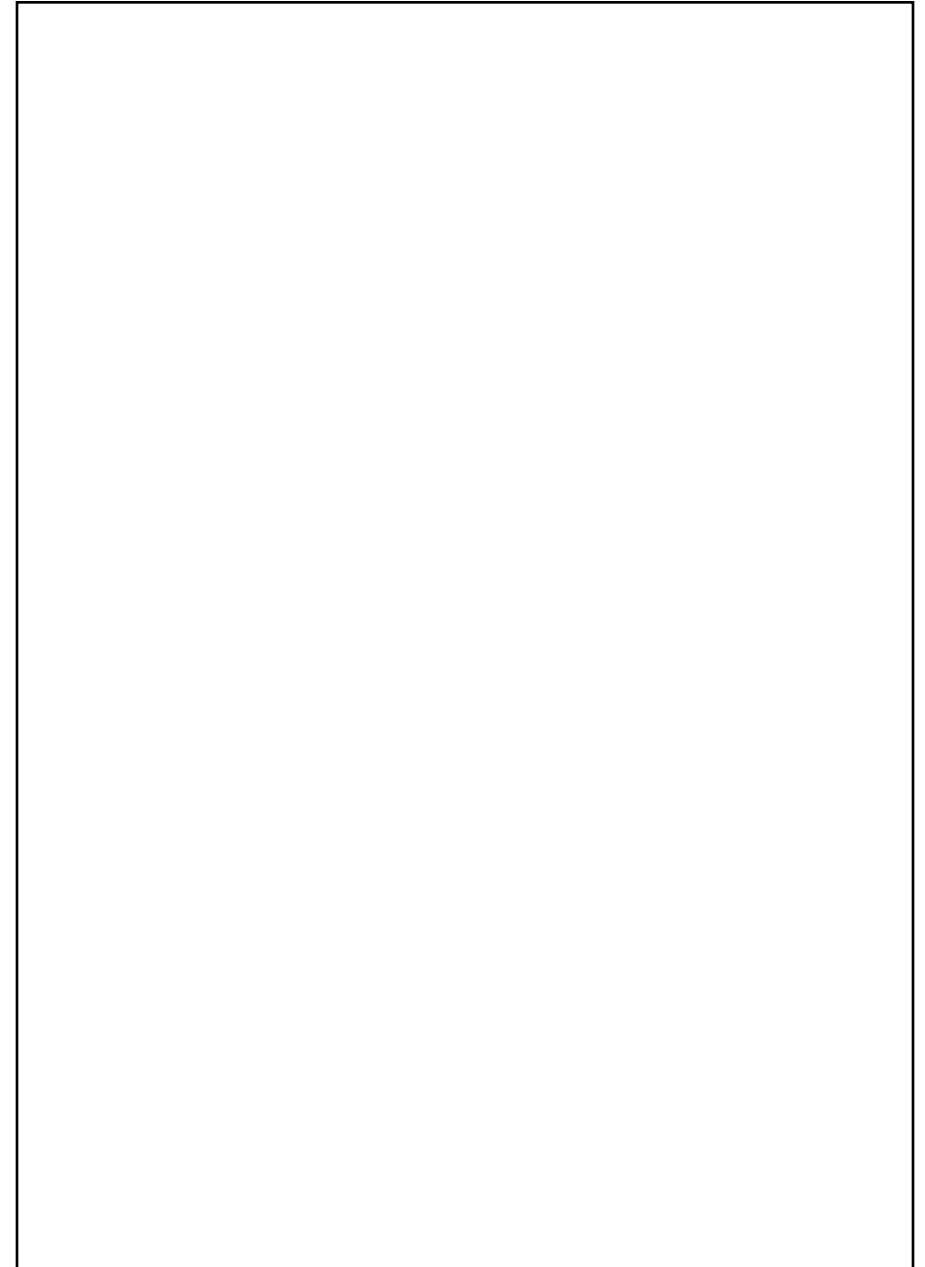
Progress from Omaha westward was initially quite rapid. Laying track across the flat, open terrain of the Great Plains wasn't too difficult. Progress slowed down when the railroad entered Native American lands. Native Americans felt the railroad construction violated their treaties with the government. The bison roaming the area presented a problem, too. The railroad company hired sharpshooters to control the bison. The animals were the main source of food for the Plains Indians.



Tensions between Native Americans and the railroad workers resulted in conflicts. The buffalo population drastically declined. The decline continued after the completion of the railroad. Passengers targeted the buffalo for amusement. With their major food source depleted, the Plains Indians had to change their lifestyle. They were confined to reservations.

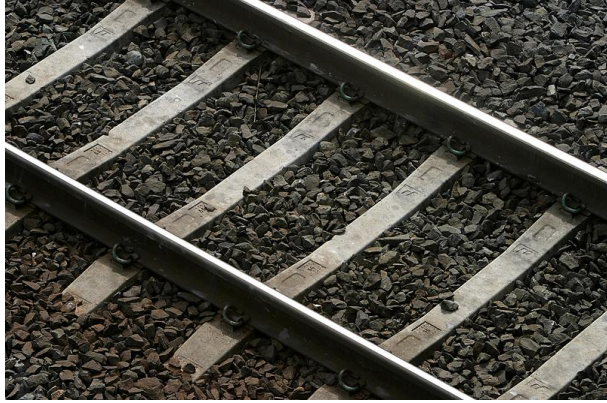


Draw a picture of the golden spike being pounded in.



Six years after the groundbreaking ceremonies, workers from both directions met at Promontory Summit in Utah. The contiguous railroad line stretched for 1,907 miles. The final golden spike was pounded in. An ordinary iron spike replaced the ceremonial spike. The railroad was ready for travel. People could now go from coast to coast in only about one week.

Answer the following questions **AFTER** you have completed this book.



The transcontinental railroad was one of the greatest technological achievements of the nineteenth century. It was a vital link for commerce and travel between the eastern and western parts of the country. Settlement of the West rapidly increased. Small towns appeared along the railroad's route. The country adopted four standard time zones. By 1890, the transcontinental railroad had played a major role in the disappearance of the American frontier.

1. What two cities were the starting points for the transcontinental railroad?

2. I think the most difficult challenge workers on the transcontinental railroad faced was _____

because _____

3. What two railroad companies were responsible for building the transcontinental railroad?

4. What are two reasons that Chinese immigrants were actively recruited to help construct the transcontinental railroad?

5. Why was the Pacific Railroad Bill important for the transcontinental railroad?

6. Write a story that explains some of the positive and negative effects of the transcontinental railroad.

7. Imagine you are a Chinese immigrant working on laying track through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Write a few journal entries that describe what your days are like. How do you feel about your work?
