



# Lesson Plan Summary

## Magic Tree House Fact Tracker: Horse Heroes

### “Pony Expressions”

*Collection of Narrative Writing*

<b>EACH STUDENT WILL:</b>	<b>COMMON CORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research and share information about the Pony Express after reading <u>Horse Heroes</u>, exploring internet resources, and gaining knowledge through literature connections</li><li>• Work in cooperative groups to compile information about the Pony Express</li><li>• Use a graphic organizer to classify information as a pre-writing activity</li><li>• Locate the Pony Express Trail on a 1860 map of the United States</li><li>• Draw and label the Pony Express Trail on a blank 1860 map of the United States</li><li>• Create examples of expository narrative writing in a journal to convey information and tell a story in the first person point of view using elements of narrative writing</li><li>• Together with a partner, evaluate narrative writing by using an editing check list</li><li>• Use new vocabulary words in narrative writing</li><li>• Appropriately illustrate narrative writing</li><li>• Participate in a large motor group activity with classmates</li></ul>	<p><b>READING:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Key Ideas and Details</li><li>• Craft and Structure</li><li>• Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</li><li>• Phonics and Word Recognition</li><li>• Fluency</li></ul> <p><b>WRITING:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Text Types and Purposes</li><li>• Production and Distribution of Writing</li><li>• Research to Build and Present Knowledge</li><li>• Range of Writing</li></ul> <p><b>SPEAKING and LISTENING:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comprehension and Collaboration</li><li>• Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</li></ul> <p><b>LANGUAGE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conventions of Standard English</li><li>• Knowledge of Language</li><li>• Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</li></ul>

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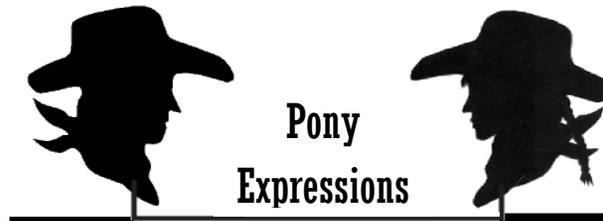
Created by: Paula Henson, 2007 Magic Tree House Teacher of the Year, Knoxville, TN



## Lesson Plan Magic Tree House Fact Tracker: Horse Heroes

### “Pony Express”

*Collection of Narrative Writing*



After students read Stallion by Starlight and Horse Heroes they will have a clear understanding of the importance horses have played in the history of our country. They will learn that Alexander the Great tamed his horse Bucephalus and he became an honored and respected friend to Alexander, aiding him in becoming the great warrior that he was. It will also become evident after delving into the facts in Horse Heroes, that horses throughout American history changed the way we live. The bond between humans and horses that is well grounded in our history remains as strong as ever today!

Students will discover after reading Horse Heroes that one of the most exciting, memorable and unpredictable times in American history was the short-lived days of the Pony Express! In 1860 before the time of telegraph when communication between the Atlantic and Pacific was nonexistent, or painstakingly slow at best, a mail service was established delivering messages, newspapers, mail, and even small packages from St Joseph, Missouri across the untamed Great Plains, over the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada to Sacramento, California by horseback, using a series of relay stations. During the 18 months of operation of the Pony Express, these death-defying young men reduced the time for messages to travel between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts to about 10 days linking the new state of California with the rest of the country. The young riders of the Pony Express faced dangers on the frontier including extreme weather conditions, Indian raids and robberies!

This seems the perfect setting for Jack and Annie to make an appearance and try their hand at being Pony Express Riders! Of course girls could not apply for this daring mission in 1860 but outdated rules never stopped Annie from participating in “boys only” activities before!

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## **Overview of Activities:**

After equipping your students with background knowledge of the time period and the history of the Pony Express and allowing them to research and share information with classmates, engage them in mapping the Pony Express route on an 1860-61 blank map of the US followed by creating a "Pony Expressions" journal with examples of expository narrative writing. Playing the role of Jack or Annie as pony express riders, assign your students the task of giving a daily account (for a period of time of your choosing) in the first person point of view of their riding experiences across this untamed territory during a volatile time in American history!

As a culminating class activity and reward for their success as writers, assist your class in planning an exciting Pony Express relay race!

## **Resources:**

- Class copies of Stallion by Starlight and Horse Heroes
- Internet Access
- Video Monitor
- Literature Connections: Collection of books about the Pony Express  
(Suggested list provided)

## **Materials Provided:**

- Graphic Organizer
- Components of Narrative Writing List
- Activity Sheet for Gathering Data in Cooperative Groups
- Rough Draft Template
- Editing Checklist
- Pony Expressions Journal Covers
- Journal template pages

## Day 1:

### Prewriting Group Activities:

Activate prior knowledge by engaging your class in one or more of the following:

1. View one or both of the following Pony Express educational videos as a class:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXFZ4qPfpvg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1R-GeEd95c>

2. Divide students into cooperative reading/research groups and allow them to choose from the following book list, gathering data for a culminating writing assignment.
3. Provide a note-taking research activity sheet entitled “Pony Express Research Notes” (included) for each group and assign one student in each group the task of collecting data.

#### Literature Connections

- Bronco Charlie & the Pony Express by Marlene Targ Brill
- Buffalo Bill and the Pony Express by Eleanor Coerr
- Pony Express by Steven Kroll
- Ride Like the Wind: A Tale of the Pony Express by Bernie Fuchs
- They're Off: The Story of the Pony Express by Cheryl Harness
- The Pony Express by Peter Anderson (Cornerstones of Freedom)
- The Pony Express by Edward F. Dolan
- The Pony Express by Lauren Van Der Linde
- The Pony Express: A Photographic History by Jan and Bill Moeller
- The Pony Express, A True Book by Elaine Landau
- The Pony Express in American History by Anita Louise McCormick
- Special Delivery by Betty Brandt

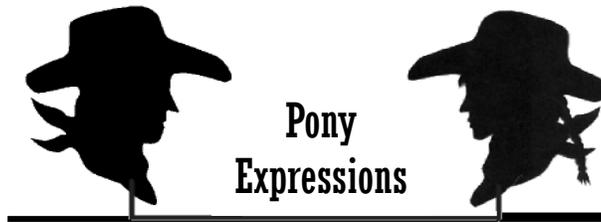
4. Show a map of the Pony Express Trail on the classroom video monitor by visiting the following website. Discuss what the territory was like at the time of the Pony Express and what traveling by horseback might have been like on the different types of terrain. Discuss the dangers the riders faced.

<http://www.xphomestation.com/xproute.html>

5. Provide each student with a blank map of the United States in 1860-61. (See link below) Have students use atlases and or the internet to find the Pony Express route that ran between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. Encourage students to label other information on their maps, such the Mississippi River, the Rocky Mountains, their home community, and other points of interest along the route that they have researched.

[http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/pdf/us1860\\_nl.pdf](http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/pdf/us1860_nl.pdf)





## **Suggested Procedure:**

After reading Horse Heroes and using the resources provided and suggested resources to further research the history of the Pony Express, your students will have gained the knowledge necessary to compile their findings and use this information to write expository narrative journal entries as Jack or Annie in their “Pony Expression” Journals.

First, print out for each student, or view as a class on your classroom video monitor, a copy of the “Components of Narrative Writing” (included) to emphasize the elements they will need to include in their journal entries.

Next, have students use the “Idea Round-Up” graphic organizer (included) to gather the information they have learned in an organized way to use as they compile their journal entries. You may choose to have students use the organizers individually, with a partner, or in small cooperative groups.

Then, after organizing the material they have learned about the Pony Express riders, explain to students that they will be writing daily accounts in a journal (included) of what Jack (or Annie) might have encountered as they traveled through the dangerous terrain from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California in the year 1860 on horseback at record speed! Remind them that this is historical fiction and just like Magic Tree House books, Jack and Annie’s roles as well as their stories are fictional while the historical facts remain true and accurate. Explain that the entries will be written in the first person point of view as if they are Jack or Annie experiencing the events they are writing about.

Print out several copies of the “Rough Draft” template (included) for each child. (Number of copies depends on how many days you wish to continue the activity.) Ask students to decide if they will start their Pony Express journey on the St. Joseph, Missouri side of the trail or the Sacramento, California side as they begin their journey with Day 1.

Ask pre-writing questions suitable for Day 1 such as:

What would you take along on your trip? What did the riders wear? How would the ponies be prepared for the journey? How would you as Jack or Annie prepare for the trip? Would family and friends be there for your departure? How would they feel about you taking such a risk?

Hand out copies of the “Rough Draft” template (included) and allow students to write their Day 1 journal entries, reminding them to keep in mind the components of narrative writing. Children will fill in the blank on the rough draft copies to indicate which day of their journey they are writing about.

Assign each child a writing partner and allow them to use the “Editing Checklist” (included) to check for and correct any mistakes with their partners they might discover in their rough drafts.

Print out either a “Jack’s Pony Expressions” or “Annie’s Pony Expressions” (included) for each child and attach five copies of the journal pages (template included). You may choose to staple the pages together or punch holes and bind with narrow jute rope to give the journals a more rustic look. You may adjust the length of the journals to fit your students’ needs and time restraints. Five copies will give children a complete week to place entries in their journals and will allow you to align this activity with the “Range of Writing” Common Core Standard. Students will find Pony Express vocabulary words and a box for illustrations on each journal page. Remind students to date each of the five pages using five consecutive dates that the Pony Express was in operation (April 1860-November 1861).

## Components of Narrative Writing:

Each entry in Jack or Annie's diary should have a beginning, middle, and end.

- **Beginning:**

-Who? -What? -Where? -When?

Descriptive Setting- Key words from your research and reading about the Pony Express should be used to create a setting for Jack or Annie's diary entries.

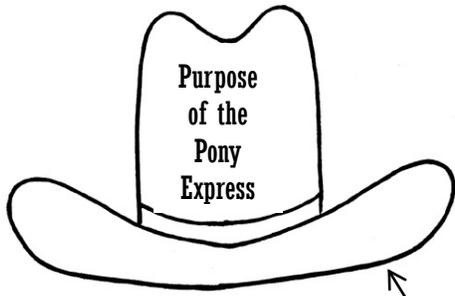
- **Middle:**

Events should include Jack or Annie's adventures as a Pony Express Rider based on your reading and research. Use order words (first, next, then, finally) to make transitions. Use Descriptive words to paint a vivid picture in your reader's mind and include **DETAILS!**

- **Ending:**

Conclusion consists of creating an ending that pulls together the main idea.

# Idea Round-Up



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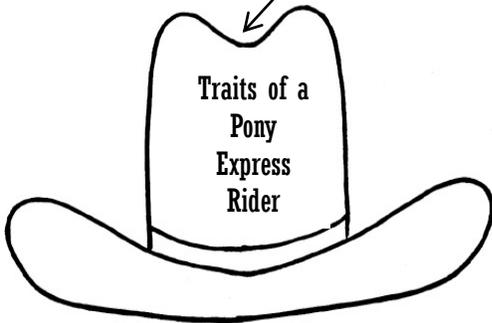
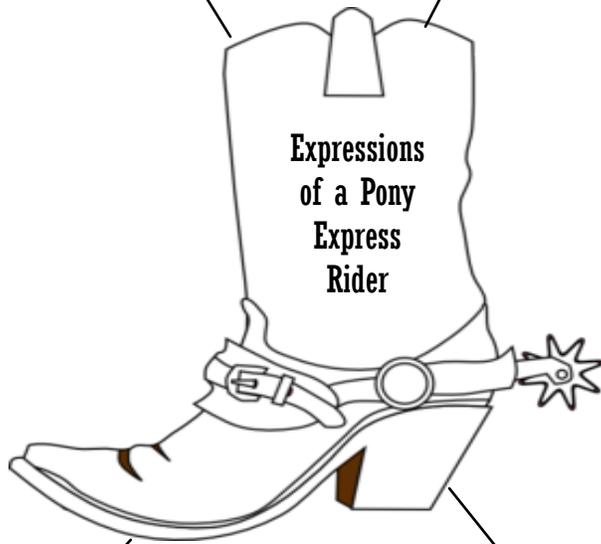


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# Editing Checklist

## Capitalization

Names

Beginning of sentences

The word I

## Punctuation

End of sentences (. ? !)

Commas when listing

## Grammar

Sentences should make sense

## Spelling

All words are spelled correctly



# Jack's Pony Expressions



By: \_\_\_\_\_

# Annie's Pony Express



By: \_\_\_\_\_



Show students a picture of an actual mochila and read the information with your class about this leather mailbag used by all Pony Express riders by following the link below in preparation for the Pony Express Relay Game.

<http://www.xphomestation.com/mochila.html>





## (A Pony Express Relay Game)

As a fun outdoor activity, allow your class to participate in a team relay race to emphasize the importance of the speed and endurance that these brave Pony Express riders had to possess in order to carry out the difficult task of delivering mail in record time on horseback over challenging terrain and, quite frequently, under dangerous conditions from St Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California.

### **Materials:**

- 4 stick horses - (available at dollar stores)
- 2 cowboy hats
- 2 neckerchiefs
- 2 mochilas (mailbags -These can be any small type of shoulder bags.)
- 1 whistle (worn by teacher)
- 1 "St Joseph, Missouri" sign (the beginning on the Pony Express Trail)
- 1 "Sacramento, California" sign (the end of the Pony Express Trail)

### **Procedure:**

- Divide your class into two teams.
- Line teams up at their respective starting lines.
- Place the St Joseph, Missouri sign at the starting line.
- The first "riders" will have already put on the cowboy hat, neckerchief and mailbag and will have mounted one of his/her team's 2 stick horses.
- At the other end of each team's line post a Sacramento, California sign and provide a second "fresh" stick horse.
- Post one member of each team at this end of their respective lines as the station keeper to hand off the "fresh" horse to the rider and receive the tired horse. (Riders of the Pony Express stopped at relay stations along the trail to get a fresh horse. These stations were manned by station keepers.)
- The teacher will start the race by blowing the whistle.
- First "riders" will race to their respective relay stations, trade their tired horse for a fresh one and race back to the starting line to hand off the stick horse, cowboy hat, neckerchief, and mailbag to the second rider.
- Play continues in this fashion until all of one team's members have all returned to the starting line. The first team to have all riders complete the race is the winner!