Name _____ Date _____

Relationships Between Events in a History Text and Main Idea: How the Mail Crossed the Country

Directions: Read how mail once crossed the country. Use the passage to answer each question.

How the Mail Crossed the Country

In 1848, gold was found in California. So many people rushed there that they needed a better link with the rest of the country.

At first the mail went by sea, on ships from New York to Panama. There it crossed a strip of land, and a second ship carried it north. At best, the trip took three or four weeks.

In 1857, Congress let the Postmaster General sign a contract for mail by land. He came from the South, and he picked a route far to the south himself. He said snow nearly stopped mail on the central route for four months each year. John Butterfield and his partners agreed to carry mail twice a week and finish each trip in 25 days. Their stagecoaches began running in September 1858.

The Pony Express began in 1860. Riders could trade tired horses for rested ones at stations, often 10 to 15 miles apart. The first mail reached Sacramento in about ten days, less than half the time a coach needed. But a half-ounce letter could cost $5. William Russell and his partners started the express to prove what many people doubted: that mail could cross the central route all year.

The riders were expected to run only until a telegraph line joined East and West. After that line was done, the Pony Express officially ended on October 26, 1861. The sea route stayed important for mail to California until 1869, when a railroad across the country was finished.

1. What is the main idea of "How the Mail Crossed the Country"?
   A. Both ships and stagecoaches carried mail to California for years.
   B. New ways to move mail, people and goods helped connect distant parts of the country.
   C. As more people moved to California, the country added new ways to carry mail there, and older ways stayed in use.
   D. Pony Express riders got mail to California faster than ships or coaches did.

2. One man said that snow nearly stopped mail on the central route. What did he do about the mail by coach?
   A. He told the coaches to carry less mail in winter.
   B. He sent the coaches by a route far to the south.
   C. He paid extra to have the snow cleared.
   D. He had the coaches use the central route only in summer.

3. Match each cause to its effect, using the passage. Two effects will be left over.
Write the letter of the matching answer on each line.

1. _____ Gold was found in 1848.
2. _____ Many people doubted that the central route could be used all year.
3. _____ A telegraph line joined East and West.
4. _____ A railroad across the country was finished.

Choices for question 3

A. The sea route became less important for mail to California.
B. Coach trips were cut to one a week.
C. Congress ended the contract for mail by land.
D. William Russell and his partners started their own express.
E. The Pony Express came to an end.
F. So many people came that they needed a better link.

4. Mail on the sea route did not travel only by water. Which detail does the passage give that shows this?

A. It had to cross a strip of land between two ships.
B. The land crossing was about 50 miles.
C. Canoes or pack animals moved it across Panama.
D. A railroad later took mail across Panama.

5. Based on the passage, how did the first Pony Express mail compare with mail by coach?

A. It took less than half the time, but sending a letter could cost a great deal.
B. It took less than half the time, and sending a letter cost the same as before.
C. It saved only a day or two, but it ran each day of the week.
D. It saved about a week, and it could carry heavy boxes as well.

6. Think about the contract for mail by land. Which two details does the passage give about what John Butterfield and his partners agreed to do? Select two.

☐ A. do the work for $600,000 a year
☐ B. carry mail twice a week
☐ C. finish each trip in 25 days
☐ D. start from both St. Louis and Memphis
☐ E. carry mail for six years

7. The Pony Express was built for speed. Which detail from the passage shows this?

A. The company bought more than 400 ponies for the Pony Express.
B. On average, a rider went 75 to 100 miles a day.
C. Riders could trade tired horses for rested ones at stations along the route.
D. With help from the Pony Express, Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address reached California in less than eight days.