

Name _____

Date _____

The Transcontinental Railroad - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. The first passenger railroads in the United States were built in the 1820s in the Northeast. The railroads connected towns and cities, making it easier to travel, ship goods, and spread ideas from one place to another. Soon Americans began to clamor for a transcontinental railroad, one that reached all the way to the West Coast. This demand was rooted in Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny was the belief that Americans had the right to control all the land from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. It was a way to morally justify westward expansion, while at the same time displacing Native Americans, Mexicans, and other groups from their land.

Which of these is true about Manifest Destiny?

- A. It was a popular book about a famous explorer.
- B. It discouraged westward expansion in the 1800s.
- C. It had no effect on the growth of the United States.
- D. ☒ It inspired Americans to explore the Western frontier.

According to the passage, the demand for a railroad that “reached all the way to the West Coast” was “rooted in Manifest Destiny,” which was “a way to morally justify westward expansion.”

2. Congress discussed plans for a transcontinental railroad in the 1840s and '50s, but these discussions ended in disagreement. Northerners wanted routes built in the North, and Southerners wanted routes in the South. In 1861, 11 Southern states seceded, and the Civil War began. With that secession, the Union states could proceed with the First Transcontinental Railroad.

In 1862, Congress passed the Homestead Act of 1862. This act encouraged settlers to “go West,” claim land, and create a homestead. Later that same year, Congress passed the Pacific Railway Act, which promised government bonds and land grants to companies that would build railroads across western lands. The act created fierce competition between the two companies that built the railroad: the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific. The Central Pacific started in Sacramento, California and built eastward. The Union Pacific started in Omaha, Nebraska and built westward. Both companies tried to lay track as fast as possible to get the most money from the government.

Which of the following best describes the relationship between the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific Railroad Companies?

A. They worked harmoniously together.



B.

They were in competition to lay track the fastest.

The passage states that the Pacific Railway Act “created fierce competition between the two companies that built the railroad: the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific,” and “both companies tried to lay track as fast as possible to get the most money from the government.”

C. The Central Pacific was responsible for paying the workers of the Union Pacific.

D. The Central Pacific was located in the Northwest and the Union Pacific was located in the Southwest.

3. Both railroad companies faced challenges. The Central Pacific started in Sacramento and had to cross the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The mountains were about 70 miles wide and got a lot of snow, making construction difficult and dangerous. It was also hard for the Central Pacific to find workers. Many people got injured or died while blasting through the rock. The Central Pacific ended up hiring tens of thousands of Chinese immigrant workers, which was controversial at the time.

Another challenge was getting supplies. The Pacific Railway Act stated that the rail materials had to be made in the US. But since there wasn't a reliable rail system yet, supplies had to be shipped from the East Coast by sea. Ships would carry supplies to Panama and back up to California or all the way around the southern tip of South America. It took a lot of time and money for these to be delivered.

Why did it take a long time for supplies to reach the Central Pacific Railroad Company?

- ✓ A. The supplies had to be sent on ocean routes.
The passage states, "Supplies had to be shipped by sea," and "it took a lot of time and money for these to be delivered."
- B. Central Pacific had to wait until Union Pacific got supplies first.
- C. The railroads delivering them were extremely slow and inefficient.
- D. The supplies were often destroyed before they reached the workers.

4. The Union Pacific had an easier path to travel than the Central Pacific. It laid rails mostly through the flat Great Plains. It also had less trouble finding workers. Many Union Pacific workers were Irish immigrants. The Union Pacific did have trouble with corruption. The vice president of the company, Thomas "Doc" Durant, used his power to concoct a money-making hoax. He and his partner cheated the federal government out of millions of dollars. He and other railroad tycoons became known as robber barons. Durant was later exposed as a fraud and investigated by Congress.

According to the passage, what was the Union Pacific's greatest challenge?

- A. Difficult terrain
- B. Finding workers
- ✓ C. Corrupt leadership
The passage describes how the Union Pacific had an easier time than the Central Pacific, thanks to "flat" terrain and "less trouble finding workers." However, "the Union Pacific did have trouble with corruption."
- D. Bad weather

5. Because the Pacific Railway Act didn't specify a meeting point, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific both raced to work faster than the other. At the beginning of 1869, the two companies were working just miles from each other. In March of that year, the newly inaugurated President Ulysses S. Grant announced that the two companies would have to decide on a meeting point. Otherwise, he would withhold federal funds. The companies agreed on Promontory Summit in northern Utah. On May 10, 1869, the final spike was driven to connect the rails of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific.

Why was Promontory Summit a crucial point on the Transcontinental Railroad?

- ☒ C. It is where the Union Pacific and Central Pacific rails met.
- A. It was the final destination of the railroad.
- B. It was another name for the Central Pacific.
- D. It is where the Union Pacific Railroad Company began building.

The passage states, "President Ulysses S. Grant announced that the two companies would have to decide on a meeting point," and "the companies agreed on Promontory Summit in northern Utah."

6. The building of the Transcontinental Railroad had both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, it made travel much faster and easier. People could ride from the East Coast to the West Coast in one week instead of six months by wagon. Coal, minerals, and other resources from the West Coast were more easily shipped around the country. On the other hand, the railroad began the destruction of natural resources like lumber. Animal populations like buffalo also suffered. It also hastened the migration of White Americans to the West and the displacement of Native Americans from their land. It effectively ended the Native Americans' traditional way of life.

Which of the following is true of the Transcontinental Railroad?

- A. It helped protect animals like buffalo.
- ☒ B. It contributed to the removal of Native Americans.
- The passage states that the Transcontinental Railroad "hastened...the displacement of Native Americans from their land."*
- C. It made it harder to ship goods across the country.
- D. It slowed the movement of white Americans to the West.