

Transportation in Early America



The Concord stagecoach pictured is on display at the International Museum of the Horse.

*This packet is intended for middle school students. It can be completed in small groups or individually.

Table of Contents

1. A Homecoming: Horses Come Back to the New World
2. 1700 to 1800: The Horse Drawn Wagon
3. 1800 to the Civil War: From Stagecoaches to Trains
4. Vocabulary
5. Timeline Matching Game
6. Writing Prompt: Letter of a Pony Express Writer



A Buggy on display at the International Museum of the Horse

A Rockaway Coupe on display at the International Museum of the Horse



A Homecoming: Horses Come Back to the New World

Before Christopher Columbus sailed to the New World on his second expedition in 1493, there were no horses in North America. All of the horses on the continent had disappeared mysteriously thousands of years ago. Prior to the reintroduction of horses, American Indians traveled the land and transported their goods by walking or by dog-drawn vehicles. This changed when Columbus and other explorers ventured to the New World and brought horses to use as transportation across North America.

As the Spanish conquistadors traveled the land, the natives they met feared and admired their horses. Since the American Indians had never seen a horse before, they considered the horse and its rider to be one animal. The Spanish conquistadors used their horses not only for transportation across the New World, but as a weapon against the natives they encountered.

Europeans continued to bring horses to the New World throughout the seventeenth century. These horses were one of the few options for easier transportation of goods on rough land that had few roads. Colonists tried to breed horses with a smooth **gait** to make riding over distances much more comfortable.



The "hanging horse" on display at the International Museum of the Horse

From Ship to Land: Transporting Horses to the New World

Horses faced a **perilous** trip across the Atlantic. The horses were loaded on to ships and placed into slings. This kept the horses off of their feet and from falling down with the swaying of the ship. Lack of exercise and harsh living conditions caused almost half of the horses to die on the journey.

As there were no docks in the New World, the horses could only get to shore by swimming to land. The horses would be blindfolded in order to keep them from panicking. Then, the horses would be lowered into water by slings and led ashore by men in row boats.



1700 to 1800: The Horse Drawn Wagon

As the population continued to grow, many colonists moved inland. Transportation within the colonies needed to develop in order to make traveling easier. Up until this time period, horses carried goods and riders on their backs. However, the colonists now needed a bigger and better way to transport their goods.

German immigrants in Pennsylvania developed a horse breed and a wagon that met the transportation needs of the colonists. The **Conestoga horse**, a **draft horse**, was bred to work in the fields and draw wagons. Coincidentally, the **Conestoga wagon** was invented for larger loads. The wagon was traditionally painted blue and the wheels were a scarlet red. A white linen hood covered the sixteen foot wagon. The wagon's large wheels prevented it from overturning or moving about too much on uneven roads. A team of six horses pulled the Conestoga wagon.



The Conestoga wagon on display at the International Museum of the Horse

The **Conestoga wagon** was vital to transportation over large areas of land. Originally, it served to transport food and supplies to other farmers. As pioneers began going west, they used the wagons to carry their belongings and resources for the trip. During the Revolutionary War, the Conestoga wagons, painted red, white, and blue, carried supplies like artillery for the army. These wagons and their horses served to transport the goods of early Americans over rough terrain. From taking goods to market to delivering war supplies, the Conestoga wagon helped to supply a growing America.



1800 to 1900: From Stagecoaches to Trains

The movement of many people and all their goods into the interior of America required the construction of roads, which made travel easier and faster. By the 1800s, stagecoaches became a popular choice for travel. **Commercial** stagecoach companies started to transport people to many different cities. These companies had various stops between cities. Here, horses drawing the stagecoach switched out with new horses.

In 1827, the Abbot Downing Company invented a new stagecoach called the Concord, and it became the preferred stagecoach for travel due to its comfort and endurance. This egg-shaped coach could carry roughly nine passengers. The bottom of the coach was held up by leather straps that allowed the coach to rock back and forth. This made travel more pleasant for the passengers on rough roads as it prevented the seats from moving with the terrain.

While the nineteenth century saw a rise in stagecoach travel, railroad travel soon became more popular for long distances. Stagecoaches and horses were still used, however, to transport people and goods around cities and in towns. Coaches were preferred for local travel and short trips.



The Concord Coach on display at the International Museum of the Horse



The Pony Express

The **Pony Express** was a mail service that went from Missouri to California. From 1860 to 1861, **Pony Express** riders transported mail across the country in just ten days. Along the route, stations were set up for horses and riders to be switched out. This kept horse and rider from becoming too tired over the long distance.

With trains and telegraphs spreading west, the **Pony Express** soon fell out of favor. Lasting only nineteen months, the mail service is remembered for the extraordinary transportation of mail by man and horse.

The route across the country was very dangerous for these men. Riding at fast speeds, the riders were careful not to be thrown off their horse. If they got lost or were caught in bad weather, the riders and the horses could die. The riders even had to be on the lookout for an attack by American Indians.



The Coming and Going of the Pony Express by Frederic Remington at The Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Fun Facts!

- There were over 200 **Pony Express** riders for the one year of its service!
- Pony Express riders rode Mustangs on their route.
- Stations were set up every 25 miles along the Pony Express route for riders and horses to switch out.
- Pony Express riders carried word of Abraham Lincoln's election as President in the 1860 election from Nebraska to California in just five days!
- The Pony Express National Museum is located in St. Joseph, Missouri.



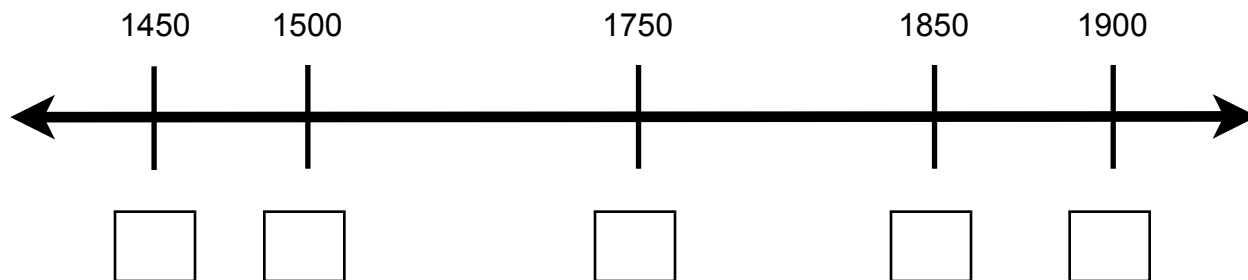
Additional Resources and Activities

Vocabulary

1. **Commercial:** a service or business to be used by many people
2. **Concord stagecoach:** a comfortable and strong stagecoach used to transport up to nine people in the 1800s
3. **Conestoga wagon:** a sturdy wagon build by German immigrants in Pennsylvania to transport goods in the 1700s
4. **Conquistadors:** the Spanish word for “conquerors;” these soldiers were known for their exploration of the North America
5. **Draft horse:** a large and strong horse used to pull carriages
6. **Gait:** a horse’s manner of walking
7. **Perilous:** dangerous or risky
8. **Pony Express:** a mail service that transported mail from Missouri to California in ten days; it was only used from 1860 to 1861

Timeline Matching Game!

Below is an incomplete timeline on the history of transportation in early America. Your task is to **write the letter** of the transportation word in the box with the correct period of time when it was used. You should use each word once.



- a. Conestoga wagon
- b. Horses
- c. Dog-drawn vehicle
- d. Train
- e. Concord stagecoach

Writing Prompt: Letter of a Pony Express Rider

The year is 1860 and you are a Pony Express rider taking a break from your long trip. You decide to write a letter to a friend about your day.

When writing the letter, consider what a day would be like for a Pony Express rider. Did you face any obstacles on your journey? Was your horse tired or full of energy? Do you like being a rider for the Pony Express? Is it an exciting life or is it scary and dangerous? Write the letter on a separate sheet of paper. Be sure to ask your teacher how long this letter should be.

