Traveling to the Distant West

Cross-Curricular Focus: History/Social Sciences



In the early days of America, the original colonies were fairly close together on the East Coast. **Travel** was by foot, by boat or by horse. People used a horse and wagon to take goods from one place to another over land. As more and more settlers arrived, they needed a better way to travel. Transportation expanded to include a few tracks of railroad. Travel in settled areas was not hard.

America began to expand toward the west. It was not as easy to get by with walking, riding a horse or using a wagon. The western lands were unknown. Many settlers went far away to claim land for their own. New areas, like the Oregon Territory, offered rich land for those who would travel there. The California Gold Rush of 1849 gave many people dreams of becoming rich. They decided to travel there and try to find gold. Many families stayed behind while husbands and fathers went alone. They planned to make a home where their families could join them later.

Theodore Judah saw that people needed a faster way to travel in this new **direction**: west. It was his dream to unite the east and west with the first transcontinental railroad. It would be a train system that would reach from one side of the continent to the other. Thousands of workers came to California to help build the tracks going east from Sacramento. Many others started building west from Nebraska. In 1869, the tracks met in Promontory, Utah. Suddenly, the parts of our nation that had seemed so distant were joined once again by the tracks.

Name: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) When the colonies were close together, how did most people travel?

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_____

2) What two things made a lot of people want to move west to settle?

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3) What was Theodore Judah's dream?

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4) Why do you think that workers built the railroad from both sides at the same time?

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5) How did the new railroad make the country feel more united?

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