Directions: Read the passage to answer questions 1-5.

From "The Meeting of the Rails" by Paul Robert Walker

It was like a circus in the wilderness. The sounds of brass bands, speeches, and laughter filled the air as about a thousand spectators milled around in the desert. Newspapers called it the second greatest event in U.S. history – second only to the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

What was it? It was the completion of the first transcontinental railroad line across the United States.

Before 1869, there were many railroads on the East Coast, but none stretched across the vast wilds of the West to the Pacific. Travel west was difficult at best, deadly at worst.

In the early 1860s the U.S. government commissioned two railroad companies-the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific – to build a track all the way across the country. A railroad that linked East and West would take settlers and goods quickly and safely across the United States.

For six years the Central Pacific had laid track eastward from Sacramento, California, battling the snows of the Sierra Nevada mountains and the heat of the Nevada desert. At the same time the Union Pacific built westward from Omaha, Nebraska.

Now they were coming together at Promontory Summit, a sagebrush-covered, isolated valley in the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah Territory.

The festivities began on Monday morning, May 10, 1869. The Central Pacific's engine, *Jupiter* – decorated in blue, red, and gold – pulled to the end of the western line. The Union Pacific's engine, *Number 119*, did the same on the eastern line. With two engines facing each other, laborers from the Central Pacific laid the last crossties, leaving space for one last tie.

Next came two teams of tracklayers carrying the last two rails. After the Union Pacific team finished, the Central Pacific stood ready to lay the final rail.

Then four special spikes were presented: two of gold; one of silver; and one of gold, silver, and iron. Construction officials from each railroad slipped the last crosstie, a beautiful piece of polished laurelwood, under the rails. The spikes of precious metal were dropped into holes in the laurelwood tie and symbolically tapped into place. Then they were removed, and a regular tie and iron spike were made ready.

1. **Analyze words/text**

   Read this sentence from the article.

   "It was the completion of the first transcontinental railroad line across the United States."

   The word *transcontinental* in this sentence means?

   a. between two states
   b. a long line of rail cars.
   c. a new type of train.
   d. stretching across a continent

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2. **Context**
According to the passage, "It was like a circus in the wilderness." The word *circus* means?
   a. Full of clowns
   b. Animals all about
   c. a (frenzied) busy activity
   d. people juggling in the wilderness

3. **Analyze words/text**
Read these sentences from the article.

"The spikes of precious metal were dropped into holes in the laurelwood tie and symbolically tapped into place. Then they were removed, and a regular tie and iron spike were made ready."

These sentences mean that the "spikes of precious metal" were
   a. put in freely.
   b. put in for show.
   c. put in carelessly.
   d. put in for strength.

4. **Context**
According to the passage, "With the two engines facing each other, laborers from the Central Pacific laid the last crossties, leaving space for one last tie." The word *crossties* means?
   a. across two ties
   b. a metal bar
   c. a piece of polished laurelwood
   d. tied pieces of steal

5. **Conclusions/Inferences**
What is the central message the author is trying to communicate with the phrase "It was like a circus in the wilderness"? Use details from the passage to support your response.

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