**Selection Summary**

Mining for gold with his Uncle Charlie is boring for Ned Benson. He convinces his uncle to let him apply for work as a Pony Express rider. Luckily, Ned gets the chance and proves himself a capable rider.

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**Characteristics of the Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Historical fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text Structure</td>
<td>• Third-person narrative; plot developed through detailed episodes&lt;br&gt;• Setting described through text and illustrations, including a map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>• Mining in Gold Rush–era California&lt;br&gt;• Responsibilities and challenges of Pony Express riders&lt;br&gt;• Dangers of the Pony Express route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes and Ideas</td>
<td>• Doing work you enjoy&lt;br&gt;• Working to prove one's worth and responsibility&lt;br&gt;• Honesty and courage as important values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and Literary Features</td>
<td>• Complex plot creates suspense&lt;br&gt;• Language specific to 1800s California setting: <em>goldfields, highwaymen</em>&lt;br&gt;• Figurative language: <em>in no time flat; as big as cherries</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Complexity</td>
<td>• Mix of short and complex sentences&lt;br&gt;• Wide range of declarative, imperative, and interrogative sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>• Words and phrases associated with mining for gold: <em>sluice box, prospectors, nuggets</em>&lt;br&gt;• Words related to horses and riding with the Pony Express: <em>saddle sores, mustangs, spurs</em>&lt;br&gt;• Spanish words—<em>mochila, cantinas</em>—defined in text&lt;br&gt;• Multisyllable words: <em>ridiculed, furiously, highwaymen</em>&lt;br&gt;• Some easy compound words: <em>saddlebag, snowdrifts</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>• Illustrations reflect the setting, time period, support text, add interest&lt;br&gt;• Seventeen pages of text with illustrations on approximately half of the pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book and Print Features</td>
<td>• Italics for characters' thoughts and for emphasis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Riding with the Pony Express  by Ian Ward

Build Background
Have students share what they know about the subject to help them visualize the story.
Build interest by asking a question such as the following: What do you know about the Pony Express? Read the title and author and talk about the illustration on the cover.
Explain that this is an example of historical fiction that is set in the mid-1800s in California.

Introduce the Text
Guide students through the text, noting important ideas and helping with unfamiliar language and vocabulary so they can read the text successfully. Here are some suggestions:

Pages 2–3: Have students look at the illustration on page 2. Explain that the main character, Ned Benson, is pouring water into a sluice box. Suggested language: Ned works for his Uncle Charlie, prospecting for gold. The text on page 3 says that Ned likes horses, and that’s one reason he wants to ride for the Pony Express. Ask: What reasons, besides loving horses, might a boy have for wanting to work on the Pony Express mail delivery route?

Page 5: Look at the sentence in the middle of the page with the italicized word. Ned says, “I’m the right size—they want boys with stunted growth like me. Finally, being small is a factor in my favor.” Why might stunted growth not be a problem for a Pony Express rider?

Page 6: Explain that the Pony Express rider being helped off his horse has been shot in the shoulder by highwaymen, which is a name for a type of 19th-century robber.

Page 9: Have students locate the word pace in the second paragraph and read the sentence aloud (At this pace, they’d reach Sportsman’s Hall well before noon.). Ask: What does Ned mean when he says “at this pace”?

Now turn back to the beginning of the story and read to find out what challenges Ned faces as a young Pony Express rider.

Target Vocabulary

evident – very easy to see or perceive, p. 6
factor – something that brings about a result, p. 5
mirage – an image in the distance that appears to be real, but is not, p. 15
pace – the rate at which something is done, p. 9
salvation – something or someone that saves or rescues, p. 5
seep – to pass slowly through small openings, p. 12
shuffled – walked without lifting your feet p. 10
stunted – growth stopped or slowed, p. 5
undoubtedly – not questioned, p. 2
vain – no chance of success, p. 16
Read

Have students read silently while you listen to individual students read aloud. Support their understanding of the text as needed.

Remind students to use the Visualize Strategy as they read. Tell them to picture in their minds how Ned handles the challenge of being a Pony Express rider.

Discuss and Revisit the Text

Personal Response

Invite students to share their personal responses to the text.

Suggested language: What did Ned have to do to convince others that he could ride with the Pony Express? Which of his words or actions do you think were most important?

Ways of Thinking

As you discuss the text, help students understand these points:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking Within the Text</th>
<th>Thinking Beyond the Text</th>
<th>Thinking About the Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ned Benson loves riding horses and wants to ride with the Pony Express.</td>
<td>Believing in yourself and following your dreams can help you be successful.</td>
<td>Chronological order of events makes the story easy to follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When another rider is injured, Ned gets the chance to prove himself as a rider.</td>
<td>People and animals can form a strong, successful team.</td>
<td>Descriptive details help readers visualize characters, setting, and events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned braves stormy weather and dodges highwaymen on a ride from Placerville to Sacramento to deliver the mail on time.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Although the characters and events are fiction, the details about the Pony Express are authentic.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Choices for Further Support

- **Fluency** Invite students to choose a passage from the text for a readers’ theater in which they demonstrate phrased fluent reading. Remind them to use punctuation to guide phrasing; to emphasize italicized terms; and to vary tone, pitch, and volume in giving expression to the different voices in the story.

- **Comprehension** Based on your observations of the students’ reading and discussion, revisit parts of the text to clarify or extend comprehension. Remind students to go back to the text to support their ideas.

- **Phonics/Word Work** Provide practice as needed with words and word parts, using examples from the text. Point out the word *prospectors* on page 3. Explain that the suffix –*or* has been added to the base word *prospect* to form *prospector*, meaning “one who mines,” or “a miner.” Remind students that looking for base words, suffixes, and prefixes can help them figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words. Have students use this strategy for other words in the story, such as *undoubtedly* (p. 2), *dismounted* (p. 10), *amazingly* (p. 12), and *steepest* (p. 15).
Writing about Reading

Critical Thinking
Have students complete the Critical Thinking questions on BLM 21.8.

Responding
Have students complete the activities at the back of the book, using their Reader's Notebook. Use the instruction below as needed to reinforce or extend understanding of the comprehension skill.

Target Comprehension Skill

Sequence of Events **TARGET SKILL** Remind students that they can use signal words, dates, and times to help them identify and follow the sequence of events. Model how to add details to the Graphic Organizer, using a “Think Aloud” like the one below:

**Think Aloud**
On the ride from Placerville to Sacramento, Ned travels a muddy, slippery downhill road. By late afternoon, he is riding a roan stallion and past the hardest part of the trail when he feels a bullet shot by highwaymen whistle past his ear. Ned slaps the stallion on the rear, and it races away at full speed. Getting shot at and escaping from the highwaymen on the stallion are two more events that happen in sequence after the first event.

Practice the Skill
Have students share their examples of other places in the story where identifying the sequence of events helped them understand the plot.

Writing Prompt: Thinking Beyond the Text
Have students write a response to the prompt on page 6. Remind them that when they think beyond the text, they use their personal knowledge to reach new understandings.

Assessment Prompts
- What does Ned say on page 5 to convince Uncle Charlie to let him try riding with the Pony Express?
- Which sentences from page 9 of the story show that Ned is a natural rider?
- What can the reader conclude about the challenges of riding for the Pony Express as described in this story? Why do you think that?
Critical Thinking

1. Think within the text
What does Ned want to do instead of working the goldfields?

2. Think within the text
What happens to Ned after he arrives at Sportsman's Hall at 11:15?

3. Think beyond the text
Why do you think Ned wants to ride with the Pony Express?

4. Think about the text
Why do you think the author includes the stories of the other Pony Express riders, such as Sam Hamilton and Warren Upson?

Making Connections
Pretend you want to get a job riding with the Pony Express like Ned. Write a short letter explaining why you want to be one of their riders.

Write your answer in your Reader's Notebook.

Critical Thinking
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Riding with the Pony Express

Thinking Beyond the Text

Think about the questions below. Then write your answer in two paragraphs.

Remember that when you think beyond the text, you use your personal knowledge to reach new understandings.

On page 17, after leaving the roan stallion in Sacramento, Ned feels as if he were leaving a friend. What does this show you about Ned? What kind of person is Ned? What kind of job do you think Ned might want to have if he lived today? Use details from the story to explain your answer.
Critical Thinking

Read and answer the questions.

1. **Think within the text** What does Ned want to do instead of working the goldfields?

2. **Think within the text** What happens to Ned after he arrives at Sportsman’s Hall at 11:15?

3. **Think beyond the text** Why do you think Ned wants to ride with the Pony Express?

4. **Think about the text** Why do you think the author includes the stories of the other Pony Express riders, such as Sam Hamilton and Warren Upson?

**Making Connections** Pretend you want to get a job riding with the Pony Express like Ned. Write a short letter explaining why you want to be one of their riders.

Write your answer in your Reader’s Notebook.
Riding with the Pony Express

LEVEL T

As Ned rode, he thought about what lay ahead. He’d read every news story he could find about the Pony Express. He knew about the first ride to Sportsman’s Hall by Sam Hamilton. Nothing stopped him—not rain or sleet, not even having to run on foot when his horse stumbled on the icy trail. Ned had also read about Warren Upson, who took that first mail from Hamilton and plunged through the deep snowdrifts over the mountains. Ned even knew about “Pony Bob” Haslam, who rode 380 miles by himself when Indian raids scared off all the other riders and horses.

Comments:

Behavior Code Error
Read word correctly ✓ cat 0
Repeated word, sentence, or phrase £ cat 0
Omission cat 1

Accuracy Rate
(# words read correctly/101 × 100) %

Total Self-Corrections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Code</th>
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