Special Delivery!

Have you ever gotten a letter? How long did it take to get to you? In the mid-1800s, a letter could take many months to get from east to west. All of that changed on April 3, 1860 with the birth of the Pony Express.

The Pony Express was a mail service from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The mail carriers were young men brave enough to make the trip. The owners considered the job so dangerous that they preferred to hire orphans.

The Pony Express riders traveled the nearly 1,900-mile route at about ten miles per hour. Every ten to 20 miles the rider would stop at a relay station, mount a fresh horse, and be on his way in less than two minutes. After riding for 75 to 100 miles, the rider stopped at a larger station and handed the mail pouch to another rider.

The Pony Express was only in business for a year and a half. In that time, Pony Express riders made 308 trips. They traveled a total of over 600,000 miles. They lost only one mail pouch.

In October of 1861, the transcontinental telegraph was completed. Now messages could travel from east to west instantly. People no longer needed the Pony Express, but they would always remember it.
Quick Quiz

13. What is the main idea of Special Delivery!?  
   p. Being a Pony Express mail carrier was a dangerous job.  
   q. Letters get from east to west more quickly today.  
   r. The Pony Express was an important mail service used long ago.

14. Where did the Pony Express mail carriers carry the letters?  
   a. from Missouri to California  
   b. from Massachusetts to California  
   c. from Missouri to Oregon

15. What does pouch mean in this story?  
   l. a bag or sack  
   m. a part of some animals  
   n. a purse for holding money

16. Why didn't people need the Pony Express after October of 1861?  
   t. People did not need to send letters after they got telephones.  
   u. The transcontinental telegraph was a faster way to send messages.  
   v. The United States Postal Service delivered letters.

Talk about what you learned  
How has sending messages in the United States changed since the days of the Pony Express?