



Jo's Triumph Nikki Tate

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Background

The Pony Express mail delivery service operated between April 3, 1860 and October 28, 1861. Using young boys (orphans were preferred), the Pony Express was able to deliver mail from St. Louis, Missouri to Sacramento, California in as few as ten days. Inspired by this remarkable feat as well as by the moving stories of a number of women of the Old West, Nikki Tate wrote *Jo's Triumph*, a novel of adventure and bravery set against the backdrop of the Pony Express trail between Carson City and Schell Creek.

Story

In 1860 in and around Carson City, struggles between the Paiute Indians, the Washo Indians and the local whites are growing, fueled in large part by ignorance and misunderstanding. During the struggles, Joselyn, a young orphan, meets Sarah Winnemucca, a Paiute girl who becomes her friend and gives her valuable advice. When Joselyn takes that advice and escapes from the Carson City Home for Unfortunate Girls, her boy's disguise and her love for and expertise with horses lead her straight to the Pony Express.

Author

Nikki Tate has been crazy about horses since before she spoke her first word, "horsie." *Jo's Triumph* is Nikki's tenth novel. She lives with her daughter and many finned, furred and feathered creatures near Victoria, British Columbia. In September, 2002, Nikki will ride ten sections of the historic trail, visiting school children along the way to talk about her passion for books and writing. For five select fifth grade classes in Nevada, she will deliver (on horseback) letters from students in British Columbia and collect letters to take back to the classes in BC.

*I love adventure. I love to ride through wild country.
You can't beat the stories of the Old West. What a great chance to
get kids fired up about reading, about their own history!*

—Nikki Tate

The Ideas

- **Math/P.E.:** Stage a Pony Express relay with stations set up around the perimeter of your school grounds. Compare how long it takes to transport a package using a new runner at each station with how long it takes for a single runner to carry the package the whole distance.
- **History:** Study the history of the postal system. How did people send letters and parcels before the Pony Express? How has the system evolved since? What is happening to the postal system in today's electronic age? Figure out how long it would take a letter to reach a destination by regular mail with how long it would take by Pony Express.
- **History:** What was it like in your part of the world at the time that *Jo's Triumph* takes place? What were relations like between aboriginal people and European settlers? Who were and who are the aboriginal people in your area?
- **Pen Pals:** Partner with a class in a different school and write letters to each other as if you were children from Joselyn's time. You could pretend that you are living in two different orphanages, one in Carson City and one in Salt Lake City, and that your letters are being delivered by Pony Express. You could even choose a school nearby, and set up stations between the two schools, put your letters in a leather pouch, and deliver them on foot, by bicycle or by car.
- **Discussion/Writing:** Do you think that Jo will make it to California? If she does, what will happen when she gets there? If she doesn't, what will get in her way? What will she say to her brothers if she finds them again?
- **Drama:** Have a small group in the class read the book and develop a way to share the book with the class as a whole, through readers' theater, or some other form of drama. They should focus on ways to entice others to read the book.
- **Writing:** Imagine that James or Sarah Winnemucca keeps a journal. Write several journal entries at key points in the story or after the story is over.
- **Art:** Create a brochure inviting settlers to travel west and settle in Utah Territory in 1860.

- Art: In *Jo's Triumph*, Jo finds out about the Pony Express from a poster. Design a poster that might be more successful at attracting new recruits.

Themes and Topics

women's and girls' roles in the nineteenth century

Pony Express

relations between aboriginal peoples (Paiute and Washo) and European settlers

California Gold Rush

settlement of the American West

orphans

responsibility

stereotypes

self-reliance

Other Orca books set in the nineteenth century

Pioneers: Chapter books *Ellie's New Home* and *The Freezing Moon* by Becky Citra.

Picture books *The Prairie Fire* and *The New Land: A First Year on the Prairie* by Marilyn Reynolds

Gold Rush: *Destination Gold* by Julie Lawson, *Pay Dirt! The Search for Gold in British Columbia* by Laura Langston

Russian Pogroms: *Jesse's Star* by Ellen Schwartz

Pony Express Picture Books
(suitable for younger and older readers)

They're Off! The Story of the Pony Express. Cheryl Harness. Simon and Schuster, 1996.

Wanted: A Few Bold Riders. Darice Bailer. Illustrated by Tom Antonishak. Soundprints, 1997.

For More

Information on the Pony Express, visit the Pony Express Museum at ponyexpress.org.

An author's note and bibliography, see *Jo's Triumph*.

Information and ideas about Nikki Tate's writing, visit stablemates.net.