

Model Passage

The following model passage demonstrates effective use of the reading tips and strategies. You will see that there are underlined words and phrases in the passage and notes in the margins. The notes in the margins refer to the underlined portions of the passage and serve as examples of the way you should think about the passage. These notes include questions you should ask yourself or comments you should make to yourself as you read.

The Railroads Connect

¹This passage will be about the disorder of the "Wedding of the Rails" celebration.

²What are the funny errors?

³The points are organized. The word first tells me to look for second, etc. Look for next and finally.

⁴Wow, that is only four days before the ceremony.

⁵Wow, \$400 of his own gold! Why? What kind of question could the test ask about this?

⁶I should look at the context of these boldfaced words. What do they mean?

⁷Those spikes were just dropped in the holes!

⁸This was a huge event if the telegraph was going to relay the sound.

On May 10, 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad was finally connected after years of hard work and confusion, but the celebration of the "Wedding of the Rails" was plagued by disorder and misunderstanding.¹

Of course, the real story is a comedy of errors.² First³ the actual location of the event was Promontory Summit, Utah, but since this was not on the map, the press reported that it occurred at Promontory Point; therefore, postcards, souvenirs, and even textbooks to this day bear the name of the incorrect location. Second, on May 4, 1869,⁴ the president of the Central Pacific Railroad, Leland Stanford, revealed to his friend, David Hewes, that no commemorative item had been made for the event. Upset by this fact, Hewes attempted to have a solid gold rail made, but after failing to find someone to finance it, he had \$400 worth of his own gold melted and cast⁵ as the "Golden Spike," which was then engraved⁶ for the occasion. Three other spikes were also made for the event. The next problem arose when the event had to be postponed because disgruntled⁶ workers and poor weather conditions delayed the arrival of officials from the Union Pacific Railroad. Finally, on May 10, 1869, the officials from both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroads convened for the celebration. A special laurelwood railroad tie was laid in place at the junction, and the specialty-made spikes were dropped into pre-drilled holes. Not one of them was actually hammered into place.⁷ Then, the laurelwood tie and spikes were replaced with a standard tie and regular iron spikes. The last spike and the hammer were connected to the telegraph line so that the entire nation could hear⁸ the "Wedding of the

⁹The name of the event is mentioned again. This must be important.

¹⁰That is funny—after all of the problems, the important people who were supposed to hammer the spike could not do it.

¹¹That is funny, too. I cannot believe no one showed up. It seems as if no one cared.

Rails.⁹ The sound of the hammer hitting the spike would then travel across the country through the telegraph line. Leland Stanford was given the first swing, but he missed¹⁰ the spike and hit the wooden tie. Thomas Durant, vice president of the Union Pacific Railroad, swung at the spike, but missed entirely. In the end, a railroad employee hammered in the final tie,¹⁰ and the telegraph operator sent the message to the country: "D-O-N-E."

Not so surprisingly, when the fiftieth anniversary celebration was scheduled, not one person showed up.¹¹ Maybe they all went to Promontory Point.

1. Which of the following best states the author's purpose?

- A. to make fun of the Transcontinental Railroad
- B. to make an accurate portrayal of an important event in railroad history
- C. to explain the importance of the Golden Spike
- D. to describe how history books sometimes contain incorrect information

(B) *The author accurately describes the confusion and mishaps surrounding the "Wedding of the Rails" celebration. All other answer choices are merely supporting points in the passage.*

2. Which of the following would be the best title for this passage?

- A. The Golden Spike Disaster
- B. Where the Railroads Meet
- C. Leland Stanford's Spike
- D. The Wedding of the Rails

(D) *The passage is about the entire "Wedding of the Rails" ceremony. After all, the ceremony's title is mentioned twice in the passage, making it significant information and appropriate for the title. Although the event was riddled with errors, it would not be considered a disaster. Finally, the passage does not focus solely on Leland Stanford's spike or where the event occurred.*

3. Which of the following did not contribute to the confusion on May 10, 1869?

- A. the telegraph operator
- B. poor weather conditions
- C. last-minute planning
- D. uncertainty about the location

(A) *The telegraph operator does not make any errors. The poor weather postponed officials, last minute planning required a friend to donate his own gold for the commemorative spike, and uncertainty about the location led to incorrect information.*

4. As used in the passage, the word *engraved* most nearly means

- A. molded.
- B. decorated.
- C. transported.
- D. purchased.

(B) *If the spike was engraved for the occasion, it must have been decorated to show its commemorative purpose. Molded is not the answer because the passage already stated that the gold was melted and cast. Although the spike would have to be transported, the context is discussing the making of the spike, not the shipping of the spike. Finally, the gold was already purchased since it belonged to Hewes.*

5. Based on the information provided in the passage, what can you infer is the reason for David Hewes's melting his own gold to make the spike?

- A. He was angry that no one would help him.
- B. He wanted to become famous for his contribution to the Transcontinental Railroad.
- C. He could find no one willing to pay for or donate the gold.
- D. He had more gold than he needed, so he was willing to give some away.

(C) *Hewes tried to find someone to finance a rail but was unsuccessful. Had he found someone willing to pay or donate at least something, then he would not have had to use his own resources. Since he looked for someone to finance a golden rail instead of financing it himself, we can infer that he did not have an overabundance of gold. There are no clues to imply he was searching for fame. Finally, the passage states that he was upset that there was item made to commemorate the event, but no mention of his being angry at finding no one willing to help.*

6. Answer the following question using complete sentences:

Why does the author call the "Wedding of the Rails" a "comedy of errors"?

The event is humorous because it was a major celebration of the uniting of the country's rails, which was a massive undertaking, and almost everything that could go wrong did. Railroad officials arrived late because their workers were unhappy, the commemorative spike was not even hammered in, and a railroad employee, not any of the officials who organized the celebration, completed the actual connection of the rails. As a final taunt, no one showed up for the fiftieth anniversary celebration.

This model passage was taken from:

Abel, Sondra Y. *Practice Makes Perfect: Preparation for State Reading Assessments*. Vol. Level 9. Clayton: Prestwick House., 2011. Print.

