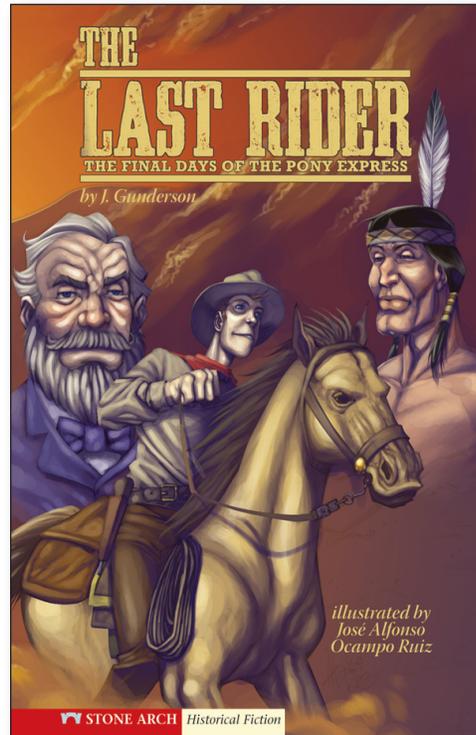




READER'S THEATER



The Last Rider **by J. Gunderson**

Characters: **Narrator**
Matt Edgars
Pony Express Officer
Attendant
Ernie
Station Keeper
Tromp

Genre: **Historical Fiction**

Ages: **8-11**

The Last Rider page 1

- Narrator:** It was an ordinary day in San Francisco in the year 1860. The sound of horses' hooves echoed in the streets. These familiar sounds made Matt Edgars long to be back in the farm in Kansas where he grew up. He had moved to the city with his mother two years ago when his father died and they had to sell their land and horses.
- Matt:** City life isn't for me. I ache for open prairies and fields of corn. Most of all, I ache for adventure.
- Narrator:** Little did Matt know that he was about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime. While on his morning walk, he saw a sign that read: Pony Express. He hurried down to the Express office hoping to become a Pony Express rider.
- Pony Express Officer:** Name?
- Matt:** Matt Edgars.
- Pony Express Officer:** Age?
- Matt:** I'm sixteen, sir.
- Pony Express Officer:** You sure you can handle riding for the Pony Express? It ain't an easy life.
- Matt:** I can do it, sir. I know I can.
- Pony Express Officer:** Report to Stone Creek Station in the Nevada Territory in two weeks.
- Narrator:** As Matt spent the next two weeks getting ready, the words his father told him just before he died kept ringing in Matt's head: "Be a hero." Matt hoped this would be his chance to do just that. First, Matt took a train to Carson City. There, he was given a horse and told to go west.

The Last Rider page 2

- Attendant:** It's about a day's ride. The horse knows the way there.
- Narrator:** After what seemed like a week, rather than a day, Matt arrived at the Pony Express station.
- Ernie:** Are you our new rider?
- Matt:** Yes, sir.
- Ernie:** I'm Ernie, the station keeper. I'll bet you want to meet the other riders.
- Matt:** Yes, sir!
- Narrator:** Matt couldn't wait to meet those brave riders.
- Ernie:** This is where you sleep. Boys! This is Matt.
- Narrator:** Matt had expected the Express riders to be full of excitement and energy. What he found was a roomful of boys that were just plain exhausted.
- Ernie:** You'll be riding three days a week between Stone Creek and Yellow Sands station. Your route is eighty miles long. You'll change horses along the way, but you won't have time for rest during your route. Ride as fast as you can. Got that?
- Matt:** Fast as I can. Yes, sir.
- Narrator:** Matt was beginning to think riding for the Pony Express sounded more like work than an adventure.
- Ernie:** Your duty is to carry the mail. And my name is Ernie, not sir! Don't forget it, kid.
- Matt:** I won't, sir. I mean Ernie...sir.
- Ernie:** Now get some sleep. You ride first thing in the morning.
- Narrator:** The next day, Matt wondered if he had made a terrible mistake joining the Pony Express riders.

Book Title page 3

- Ernie:** You have two minutes to get the mochila (moh-CHEE-la) on your horse. The mochila is the pouch that holds the mail. Look! Rider coming! You ready?
- Matt:** Ready as ever!
- Ernie:** Careful, boy. Your horse, Tiger, is a wild one.
- Narrator:** Matt began his first ride on a wild horse with only a small pistol and a canteen filled with water. After a long day, he spotted a small station.
- Matt:** That looks like the next station, Tiger. That's where you and I say farewell.
- Station Keeper:** Any troubles?
- Matt:** Nope. All's well.
- Station Keeper:** Good. I've been worried.
- Matt:** About what?
- Station Keeper:** Never mind.
- Narrator:** Matt rode through the next afternoon barely able to keep his eyes open. He was surprised by a strange noise: Whooooooo-eeeeeeeeee! Telling himself it was just a wild animal, Matt pressed on to the next station.
- Tromp:** Rider coming!
- Matt:** Yellow Sands Station at last!
- Tromp:** First ride, huh? Come on in and eat some grub. My name's Tom, but you can call me Tromp. Beans and cornbread is all I've got.
- Matt:** It's delicious. Thanks!
- Tromp:** You must be taking over Bill Burns's route. Poor Billy.
- Matt:** Whatever happened to him?

Book Title page 4

Tromp:

Eat all you want, kid. And get some rest. You've got another ride tomorrow.

Narrator:

Matt tossed in his bed that night. He couldn't help thinking about Billy Burns, the strange sounds he had heard, and the way everyone was concerned for his safety. Had he walked into danger without knowing it? And if so, what dangers did he face? Find out more about Matt's adventures and what happened to Billy Burns by reading *The Last Rider: The Final Days of the Pony Express*.

THE END