

## Rollercoaster Comprehension

# The History of Roller Coasters



### Margin Notes

Have you ever ridden a roller coaster? You may think they are dangerous, but you have a greater chance of getting hurt falling out of bed than you do riding a roller coaster. Roller coasters can be scary, but that is what makes riding them so fun. They are actually very safe. Coasters also have an interesting history.

The idea of a roller coaster was first born in Russia. Russians froze water over a 70-foot-tall wooden structure. This created an ice ramp. Riders would sit in a block of wood and ice stuffed with straw. Then someone would push them down the ramp. People from Paris, France wanted in on the fun. When they tried to **duplicate** the same ride, though, they failed. This is because France is so much warmer than Russia. In 1817, the French people decided to make a track to ride on. They also added wheels to the riding blocks. This became the first roller coaster ever built.

Did you know that roller coasters do not have engines to work? They move by changing potential energy into kinetic energy. Potential energy is what the coaster has when it is sitting on top of the track. Once it begins to roll down the track, the energy changes to kinetic. That is the energy that gives the coaster enough power to get up the next hill. And all those hills are what make the ride so much fun for riders!

Today, roller coasters can go very fast! However, the very first roller coaster ever built in the United States only went six miles per hour. It was called the Switchback Railway. It opened in June 1884 in Coney Island, New York. Although it wasn't very fast, people were happy to pay a nickel for a ride. This first roller coaster made people excited about coasters. Other roller coasters began to be built. Each new ride seemed to get a little bigger and a little faster.

Today, the fastest roller coaster in the world is in the United Arab Emirates. It can reach almost 150 miles per hour in less than five seconds. That's fast! You may not be able to travel so far to ride such a fast roller coaster, but six out of the 10 fastest rides are in the United States. You won't be able to ride for just a nickel, though. Prices to get into most parks are around \$60.

Many people love roller coasters! It is thrilling to ride up so high and then back down so quickly! Not all people like riding roller coasters. Some people suffer from motion sickness. There is a lot of motion on a roller coaster. In fact, Ron Toomer, the famous roller coaster designer, had motion sickness. He could only ride his own coasters a couple of times a year. Most roller coaster fans can't wait for their next ride, though.

This summer, mark August 16<sup>th</sup> on your calendar. August 16<sup>th</sup> has been named National Roller Coaster Day. Roller coasters deserve their own day. They have brought kids and adults a lot of fun and excitement for over 100 years. So, mark your calendar and find an amusement park. Then, take a thrilling ride on a roller coaster!



## First Reading Questions:

1. What is this passage mostly about?

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2. Where did the idea of the roller coaster first happen?

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3. Where and when did the first roller coaster open in the U.S.?

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4. Where is the fastest roller coaster in the world and how fast is it?

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5. What is special about August 16<sup>th</sup>?

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## Text Evidence Questions:

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

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2. List three details that support the main idea:

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Give 2 details about the Switchback Railway.

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4. Cite 2 pieces of evidence from the text that describe the first roller coaster ever.

a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Explain how roller coasters move without engines.

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6. Explain why some people, such as Ron Toomer, do not like to ride coasters.

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