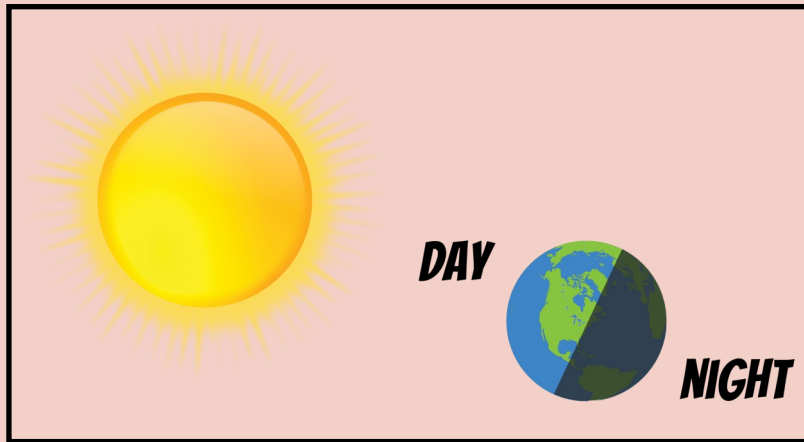


UNDERSTANDING TIME ZONES

What are time zones and why do we need them?

Because the earth is round, the sun can only shine on a section of the earth at a time. When the sun shines on a part of the earth it is day time there. For the part of the earth that doesn't face the sun it is night time. As the earth spins, a different part of the globe faces the sun at different times.



The United States is so big that the sun shines on different parts of it at different times. For a long time, each local community kept track of its own time by watching the sun. When the sun was directly overhead, it was noon. Anything before that was morning, and anything after that was afternoon. When the sun went down it was night.

Traveling from one place to another was slow and keeping time was not very precise because it was based on the sun. So people didn't notice local differences in time.

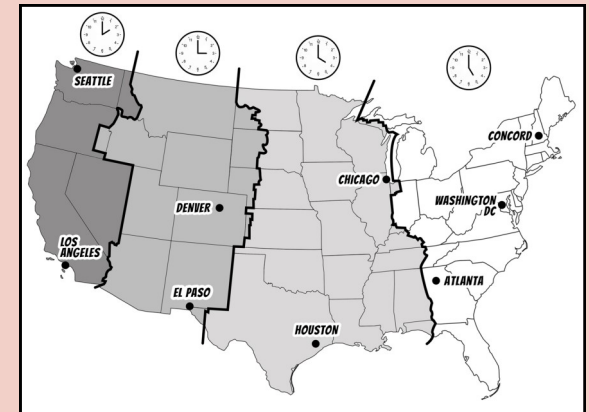


When industrialization started, people began to keep better track of time because it helped coordinate the workers in the factories.

The railroads also made people pay more attention to time because they ran on schedules. And railroads allowed people to travel long distances in a short amount of time. These changes made the differences in local time more noticeable.

In the early 1880s, the United States adopted a standard time, called Greenwich Mean Time. It meant people wouldn't rely on local time anymore. But there was still the problem of when the sun shone on the earth. It was different when you moved from the east coast to the west coast. For example, if it was 9 o'clock at night in New York, it would still be daylight in Denver or Seattle.

To fix this, the government designated time zones across the country. People moved their clocks back by 1 hour as they traveled west through each time zone. For example, if it was 8:04 p.m. in New York, it was 7:04 p.m. in Chicago, 6:04 p.m. in Denver, and 5:04 p.m. in Los Angeles.



Time was still coordinated, but the time zones took into account the rotation of the earth and when the sun shone on each part of the country.