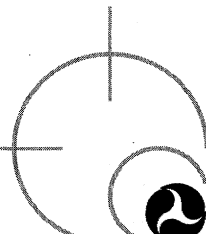




**THE GARRETT A. MORGAN
TECHNOLOGY AND TRANSPORTATION FUTURES PROGRAM
— EDUCATING TOMORROW'S TRANSPORTATION WORKFORCE**

The History Of Transportation Along The Mississippi River



KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3

The History Of Transportation Along The Mississippi River

Dear Teacher or Youth Activity Leader,

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration is pleased to provide you with this activity guide for discussing the history of transportation along the Mississippi River with children and youth of various ages.

Modules for four grade levels are included:

- Kindergarten through Grade 3
- Grades 4 through 6
- Grades 7 through 9
- Grades 10 through 12

Each module includes an essay. The essay can serve as the basis for an initial discussion, or the teacher may wish to read the essay to younger children. Teachers may have older students read the essays, or use the essays as the basis for classroom lectures.

Each module also contains suggested questions or activities based on the essay.

This activity guide was developed to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Great River Road in 1998. The Federal Highway Administration has partnered with the Mississippi River Parkway Commission and Motor Memories, Inc. to provide this material to teachers and youth activities leaders in communities along the route of the Great River Road Ramble.

This activity guide also is available on the Internet at: www.hend.com/grr

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3

River Transportation

The Mississippi River is the longest river in our country. Many people have lived along the river. They all used the river for transportation.

The first people who lived on the river were Native Americans (Indians). They used birchbark canoes.

Later explorers came. They used canoes too.

Farmers settled along the river, and needed to go to the market in New Orleans. The farmers and traders used flatboats to travel on the river. Flatboats were wooden boats that floated down the river. They could not go up the river. When the owner wanted to go up the river, he or she had to walk or ride their horse. They had to follow the Indian trails. It was dangerous.

The first roads were built by widening the Indian trails. The government had to make a treaty with the friendly Indians in order to use their trails. The roads in olden times were very bad. Horse-drawn wagons and carriages often got stuck in the mud. They did not have paved roads.

Keelboats replaced flatboats. They could go up the river, too. People pulled the keelboats up the river using poles or big ropes.

Steamboats made it much easier to travel on the river. Big cities grew along the river, and there were many steamboats carrying people and cargo.

Later trains changed life along the river. People traveled by train instead of riverboat. Freight trains carried cargo, but some cargo still went by barges on the river. When the first bridges were built across the Mississippi River, the trains could take people and things to the other side of the country.

In the 1900s cars were invented. Now people could travel more easily than ever.

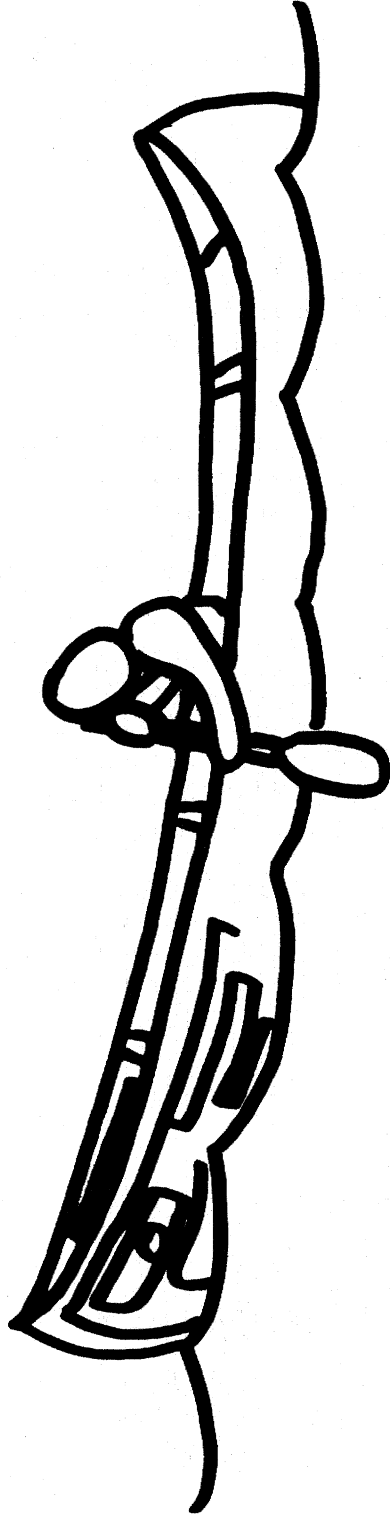
Now, we go to the river mostly for fun. We like to walk and swim and fish there. We can still see some barges carrying freight on the river. It is good to think about all the people who have lived along the river before us.

ACTIVITY FOR K THROUGH 3

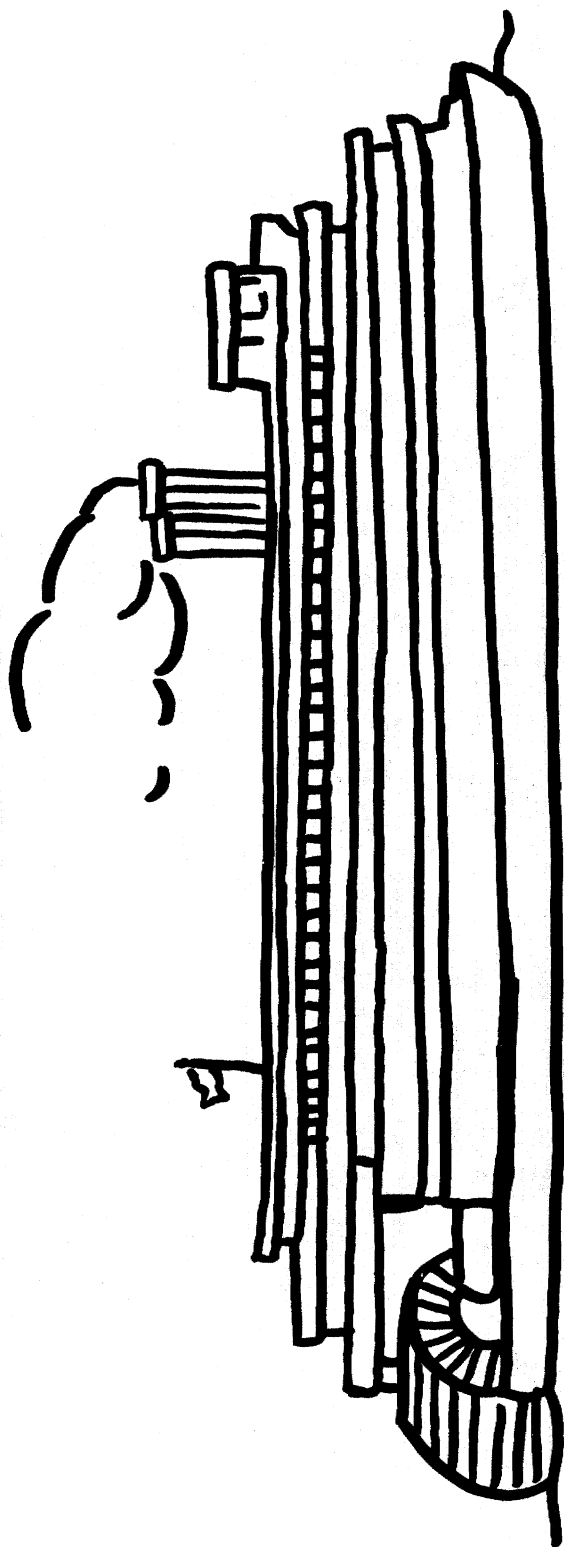
Make copies of the drawings on the following pages.

Discuss with the children:

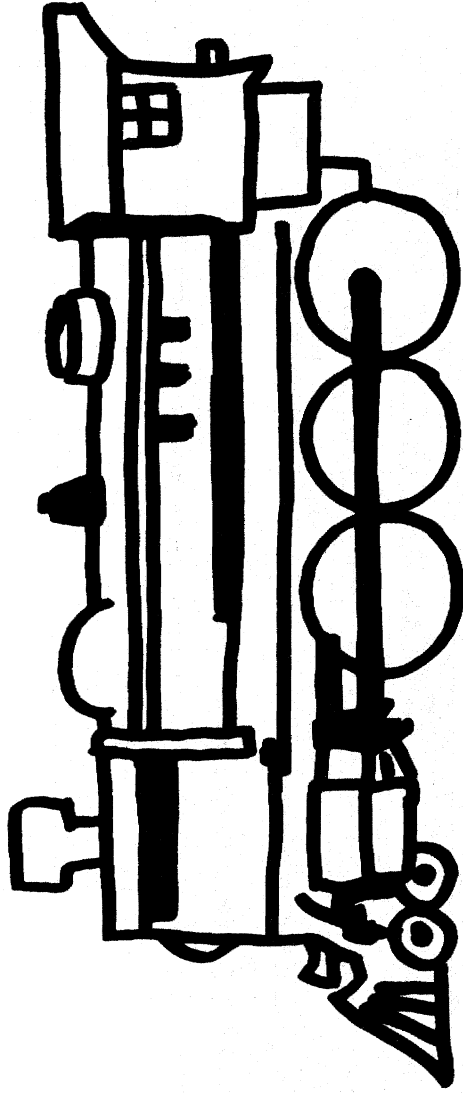
1. Which car is the old-time car? Which one is a modern-day car? Have the children color the cars.
2. Which boat is the canoe? Who used canoes? Which boat is the steamboat? What did steamboats carry? Have the children draw around the canoe and the steamboat to tell a story about life on the river.
3. What do trains carry? Have you ever been on a train? Have the children draw pictures around the train.



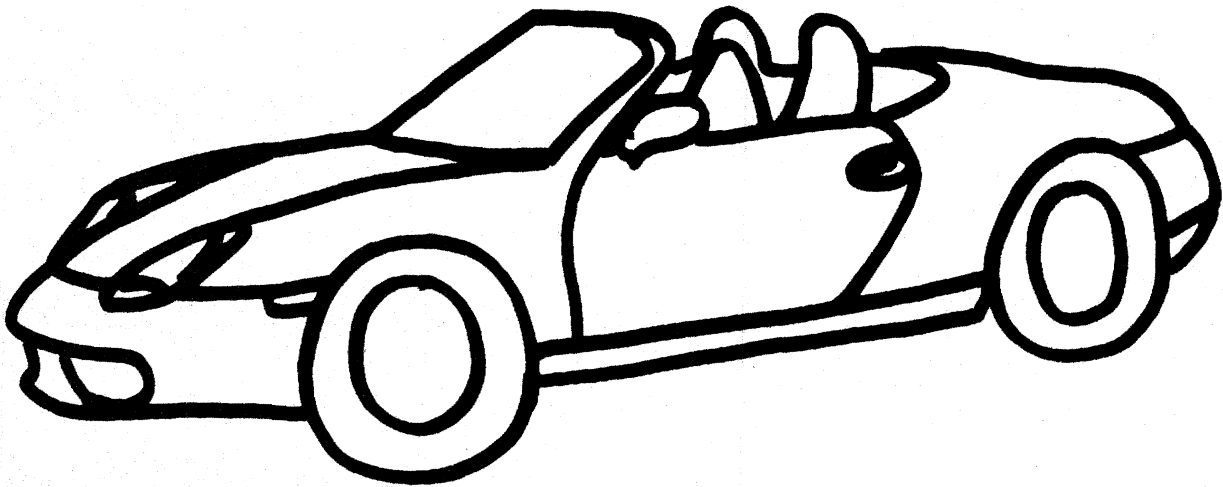
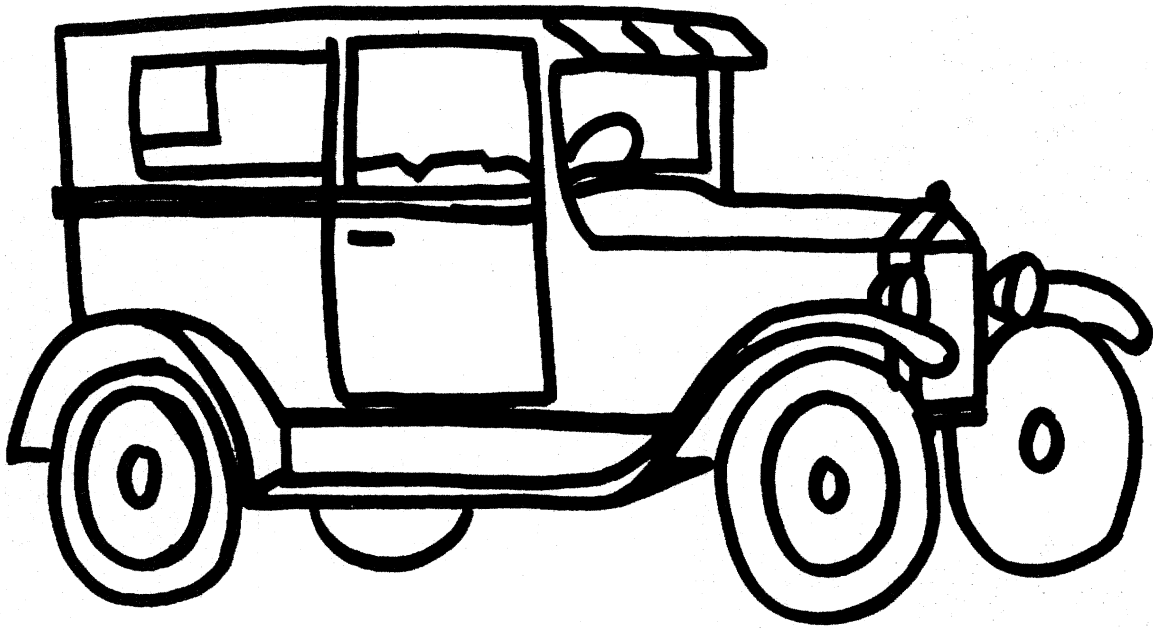
Draw a picture around the canoe.



Draw a picture around the steamboat.



Draw a picture around the train.



Color the old and new cars.

GRADES 4 THROUGH 6

The Mississippi River and Transportation

The Mississippi River is the longest river in North America. It has always been a transportation route. Some of the popular names for the Mississippi River are the “Old Man River,” the “Big River,” and the “Great River.”

Before there were roads or railroads or boats or even people, animals traveled along the Mississippi. Birds follow the river to their winter nesting places, and then back home. You can see ducks, geese, swans, and other birds in the lakes and swamps along the Mississippi.

The first people who came to the Mississippi were wandering hunters. Later the Native Americans (Indians) came. They had birchbark canoes, and used the river as a trading route.

Later, explorers paddled birchbark canoes up and down the river to find out what was there. They were looking for gold to take back to Spain. French explorers came looking for routes for fur trading.

The first Europeans to live along the river were fur traders, missionaries, and miners from Spain and France. Later British settlers came, and built farms.

The farmers and traders used flatboats to travel down the river. Flatboats were like rafts, and they floated, but were hard to steer. Farmers and traders made flatboats and went to New Orleans to sell their goods, and then sold the flatboats for firewood. They rode their horses or walked back home along the Indian trails. The river and the trails were full of thieves, and life was dangerous but adventurous for the flatboatmen.

1800s

In the early 1800s, the government widened one of these Indian trails and made one of the first roads in the southern Mississippi River region. Today, the Natchez Trace Parkway follows the same route.

Also in the early 1800s, people began to use keelboats. They were better than flatboats because they could be steered and they could come back up the river. People dragged them up the river using poles or cables. That was hard work! It took many months to travel up the river.

1803

In 1803, Thomas Jefferson bought New Orleans from France. He also bought the rest of the land that France had claimed in the Mississippi Region, which was known as the Louisiana Territory.

After Jefferson bought this land, many more settlers came to the Mississippi River.

1812

During the War of 1812, the British tried to take New Orleans away from the Americans. Andrew Jackson beat the British and no other country has ever tried to take away the land along the Mississippi since.

Steamboats made it much easier to travel on the river. Big cities grew along the river: New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Natchez, Memphis, St. Louis, and Minneapolis/St. Paul. Many of these cities were located where other rivers intersected.

During the Civil War, everyone who lived along the river suffered. President Lincoln had Union gunboats block the river traffic in the South. People couldn't get their goods to market, and so no one had any money.

After the Civil War, good times returned to the river. You can read about this time in books written by Mark Twain. (Mr. Twain's real name is Samuel L. Clemens.) The riverboats of this time were very fancy, and included musical entertainment for the passengers. The entertainers came from the cities along the river. New Orleans Jazz, Memphis Blues, Dixieland, and Ragtime are some of the special types of music that were first performed along the river.

When the railroads came, life along the river changed. People didn't travel on the river any more. Instead they went by train. Some goods were still shipped in river barges, but most were shipped on freight trains. Soon, bridges were built and the trains could cross the river. This changed life even more, because people could get from one place to another so much more easily.

1900s

Until the 1900s, roads were generally very poor. Horse-drawn carriages often got stuck in the mud or sand. When the first cars were invented, they too got stuck in the mud often.

Soon people demanded better roads, and the government began to build paved roads of asphalt or concrete. Pretty soon cities began to be linked by paved roads, and people began to travel longer distances by car, just as they do today.

1960s and 1970s

After World War II, lots more people bought cars. The roads became too crowded. President Eisenhower called for a new system of highways called the Interstate Highway System. The Interstate System was built in the 1960s and 1970s. It has made it much easier and quicker to get from one part of the United States to the next. As a result, people in different parts of the country became more alike.

Today, airplanes make it possible to travel to different countries more quickly. As a result, people all around the world are becoming more alike.

Some goods still travel in barges on the Mississippi River, but most of our things come to us by truck or railroad today. When we visit the river now, it is usually to enjoy a park or go swimming, or to visit a historical sight and see the pretty scenery. One way to see the river is to drive on the Great River Road. The Great River Road starts in Canada and follows the Mississippi from its beginnings all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

When we see the river, it is nice to think about the stories of everyone who has lived along the river in the past.

ACTIVITY FOR GRADES 4 THROUGH 6

Discuss with the children:

- What are some of the names for the Mississippi River?
- Who here has visited the Mississippi River? What did you do there?
- Who here has been on a raft? Could you steer it?
- Who has been in a canoe? How did you steer that?
- Who has been on a train? Where did you go on the train?
- Who has seen a riverboat? Has anyone ever ridden on a riverboat?
- Can you imagine what it was like before there were cars?
- Can you imagine what it was like before there were roads?

Using a geographic map of the United States, have the children locate:

- Where the Mississippi begins
- The Gulf of Mexico
- The ten states along the river
- Major rivers that intersect the Mississippi and the cities that are located there

Have the children draw a picture of traveling on the Mississippi River in olden times, or in modern times.

GRADES 7 THROUGH 9

The River Was Their Route:

A History of Transportation along the Mississippi River

The Mississippi River is the longest river in North America. It starts in northern Minnesota and flows all the way to the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of 3849 kilometers (2,400 miles). The Mississippi flows through ten states: Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

Some of the popular names for the Mississippi River are the “Old Man River,” the “Big River,” and the “Great River.”

The Mississippi River has always been an important transportation route. Before there were roads or railroads or boats or even people, the river was a path for wildlife. Birds have always followed the river from the cold north to warmer winter nesting grounds. Today, you can see ducks, geese, swans, and other birds in the many lakes and swamps along the Mississippi.

The first people to come to the Mississippi were wandering hunters. They arrived from the north about 6000 BC.

Native American Cities

Later, Native American settlements sprang up along the Mississippi. The Native Americans used the river as a communications and trading route. Between 800 and 1400 AD, the Mississippian Culture tribes thrived.

The Mississippian Culture Indians lived in big cities that had houses and temples. The most important buildings, such as the leaders' homes and the temples, were built on big earth mounds. The most important parts of the city were surrounded by a big wall called a “stockade.” Outside the wall were fields where food was grown. The Mississippian Culture people grew corn, squash, pumpkin, sunflower, marsh elder, may grass, lambsquarter and barley. They also caught fish from the river and nearby lakes, and hunted small animals.

You can see the remains of settlements of the Mississippian Culture tribes the Cahokia (kuh-ho-key-uh) Mounds State Historic Site in Collinsville, Illinois; at the Emerald Mound along the Natchez Trace Parkway near Natchez, Mississippi; at the Wickliffe Mounds Research Center at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in Kentucky; and other sites.

No one knows why the Mississippian Culture Indians disappeared. They are not related to the Native American tribes that were there when the European explorers and settlers came.

Europeans Explore the Mississippi

The first European explorer to find the Mississippi was Hernando deSoto of Spain. DeSoto arrived at the Mississippi near Memphis, Tennessee in 1541. He was looking for gold. He was very cruel to the Native Americans who lived along the Mississippi at the time (the Chicasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez tribes).

More than 100 years later, in 1673, Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet paddled birchbark canoes all the way from Lake Michigan to the Arkansas River, and back. They were looking for a way to the Pacific Ocean. They figured out that the Mississippi flowed to the Gulf of Mexico. They had discovered a great transportation route, but they were disappointed because they were looking for another route.

Nine years later, the French explorer Robert La Salle canoed down the Mississippi from the Illinois River to the Gulf of Mexico. He claimed all of the land that the Mississippi River drained for France. He named it "Louisiana." He wanted to use the river as a fur trading route.

Soon, there were many different types of people who lived along the river. Indians came first. Then by the early 1700s the Spanish and French fur traders and miners came, and missionaries who were trying to convert the Indians to Christianity. They lived in frontier outposts or missions. By the late 1700s, British colonists arrived. They built farms along the river. Logging camps sprung up in the north.

New Orleans and the Flatboat Era

By the late 1700s, New Orleans had become a trading center. Farmers and traders who lived along the river built flatboats, which were like rafts, and floated down the river to New Orleans to sell their cotton or other products. They sold their boats for firewood, and walked or rode their horses back home. They had to follow the Indian trails. Both the river and the trails were full of thieves, so life along the river was dangerous.

The Natchez Trace

In the early 1800s the government made a treaty with the Choctaws and Chickasaws so they could widen the Indian trails and build a road. The U.S. Army built the road between Nashville, Tennessee and Natchez, Mississippi on a trail that was known as the "Natchez Trace." Today the Natchez Trace Parkway follows the original route of the old Natchez Trace.

Keelboats

In the early 1800s keelboats began to replace flatboats as a way to travel on the river. The keelboats had a V-shaped hull, so they were easier to steer than flatboats. They could travel up river, too. They were dragged against the river current by human power, using cables or poles. It took three months to push from New Orleans to Louisville!

The Louisiana Purchase

In 1803, Thomas Jefferson bought New Orleans and the entire Louisiana Territory from France. This doubled the size of the United States. He sent Louis and Clark to explore for a trade route up the Missouri to the Pacific Ocean. They failed to find the nonexistent Northwest Passage.

After the Louisiana Purchase, more and more people settled along the Mississippi River.

The War of 1812–The River Becomes All-American

The Mississippi River became an American river once and for all during the War of 1812. Andrew Jackson's Army of the Tennessee Volunteers saved New Orleans from a threatened invasion by the British. That was the last time any other country has tried to stake a claim to the land along the Mississippi.

Steam Fuels Commerce

In 1811 Robert Fulton invented the steamboat. The steamboat made it much easier to move goods and people up and down the river. Soon many of the little trading outposts along the river became big cities with big river ports: New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Natchez, Memphis, St. Louis, and Minneapolis/St. Paul. Many of these cities also were located where other rivers intersected. Goods could travel by boat to cities to the east or west of the Mississippi along those rivers.

The Civil War

During the Civil War, the people who lived along the Mississippi River suffered, whether they were on the side of the Union or of the Confederacy. Early in the Civil War, President Lincoln had Union gunboats block river traffic in the South. Southerners couldn't get their goods to market without the river. St. Louis turned Union a few weeks into the War, but still suffered greatly because of the blockade on traffic heading South.

Many slaves were able to escape to the North by following the river. An Underground Railroad route of hidden trails and tunnels along the river led many to freedom.

Vicksburg, Mississippi was the site of one of the great, and last, battles of the Civil War because Vicksburg fought hard against the Union blockade. The Battle of Vicksburg and the Battle of Gettysburg both took place in the summer of 1863. When the Confederacy lost both battles, the Civil War was over.

Mark Twain and American Music

After the Civil War good times returned to the Mississippi River. The steam-powered sternwheeler boats went up and down the river full of passengers and cargo.

You can read about this time in the books written by Mark Twain. Mr. Twain's real name was Samuel L. Clemens.

Passengers on the riverboats enjoyed musical entertainment. Some of the best-known American music has grown up in the cities along the river: New Orleans Jazz, Memphis Blues, Dixieland, and Ragtime.

Roads in the Late 1800s

In the late 1800s, roads in the Mississippi River region were generally poor. Horse carriages often got stuck in the mud or sand. Most people were farmers at that time. They had a terrible time getting supplies to their farms and getting their goods to market. People who lived in the cities had better roads, but they had to spend a lot of money for their food, because transporting farm goods was so difficult.

Railroads Change the River

In the mid-1800s, railroads arrived, and changed life along the river. Now only very bulky materials such as iron, coal, lumber, and manufactured goods traveled by the river. Passengers and other goods went by train.

The railroads helped the cities along the river to grow, and linked people who lived along the river to the rest of the country in a way they had not been before.

Bridges

The mid-1800s also was the time when the first bridges were built along the Mississippi. The river is very wide. It had formed a barrier to development of the Western United States. When engineers first figured out how to build a bridge across the Mississippi, it was considered a great achievement, because many people had thought it couldn't be done. The first bridge on the river was built at Rock Island, Illinois in 1856. The Eads Bridge was built in St. Louis in 1874, and is still in service. It was one of the engineering marvels of its time.

The Good Roads Movement

Starting in the 1880s, people began to demand better roads. The roads were crowded with horse carriages and bicycles, and people were tired of getting stuck in the mud.

At that time, paved roads had been invented but people didn't know much about them. The government built short sections of paved roads near colleges, so people could see that better roads were possible. Soon, more towns decided to build paved roads.

The Lincoln Highway

By 1913, cars had been invented and people were interested in paved roads that would link different states, called "interstate" roads. Between 1920 and World War II, the nation's road system began to take the form that we know today.

Modern Times: The Interstate System and Airplanes

After World War II many people bought cars. The roads were full of traffic, and trucks had trouble delivering goods on time. President Eisenhower called for an Interstate Highway System so trucks and cars could travel from state to state without going through the middle of cities. The Interstate system we know today was the result. It has changed our way of life by making it much easier and quicker to travel from one region of the United States to another. As a result, all Americans are more alike than they were in the past.

Today, air travel is making it easier to travel from one country to another, and as a result, people from different countries are getting more alike.

The river continues to move goods, but few passengers. Now we go to the river mostly to relax at parks, eat at restaurants, boat, swim or fish. We can travel the length of the river along a scenic route known as The Great River Road, remembering the wonderful history of others who have traveled along our country's greatest river.

ACTIVITY FOR GRADES 7 THROUGH 9

Questions for Discussion:

- Which 10 states does the Mississippi flow through?
- Who or what first used the Mississippi for transportation?
- Who were the first people who came to the Mississippi River?
- How did the Mississippian Culture Indians live? What did they eat? What kinds of houses did they have?
- Name some of the explorers who came to the Mississippi River.
- How did the early traders and farmers get their goods to market in New Orleans?
- How did the flatboatmen get home after they went to New Orleans?
- What is a keelboat? How is it different from a flatboat?
- What was the Louisiana Purchase?
- Who were Louis and Clark?
- What was the Northwest Passage?
- Who was Andrew Jackson?
- Who invented the steamboat?
- What cities were big river ports during the steamboat era?
- What happened along the river during the Civil War?
- Who was Mark Twain?
- Name some different types of music that started along the Mississippi River.
- What were roads like in the late 1800s?
- How did railroads change the river?
- When were the first bridges built along the Mississippi? Why was this important?
- When did our modern system of roads develop?
- What President asked Congress to build an Interstate Highway System?

Locate on a map:

- Major port cities along the Mississippi River.
- Rivers that intersect the Mississippi.
- The headwaters of the Mississippi.
- The Gulf of Mexico.

GRADES 10 THROUGH 12

The River Was Their Route:

A History of Transportation along the Mississippi River

The Mississippi River is the longest river in North America. It flows 3,849 kilometers (2,400 miles) from its headwaters in northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana. The river slices through the heart of our country, passing through ten states: Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

The Mississippi River always has been a major transportation route. Even before people came to the river valley, birds followed the river's path from the cold north to warmer winter nesting grounds. Up to 40 percent of North America's ducks, geese, swans and birds use the Mississippi flyway. Many lakes and swamps along the Mississippi—especially south of the confluence of the Missouri River—shelter these birds and waterfowl. There are many parks and wildlife refuges along the river where people can see the wildlife.

The river has influenced the way of life of all the people who have lived along its banks, and has helped shape the history of our country. The first people to come to the river were nomadic hunters. They arrived about 6000 BC at the headwaters of the Mississippi, having come from the north and west. Later, Native American settlements began to develop along the Mississippi River Valley.

Native American Cities

The Native Americans used the river and its many branches as a communications and trading route. The Mississippian Culture tribes, which thrived between 800 and 1400 AD, had a very advanced civilization. They built stockaded cities that featured large earthen mounds that were used to elevate important buildings and locations. Some of these important buildings were the temples, or the homes of the tribal leaders.

The ruins of the greatest of all the Mississippian cities can be seen at the Cahokia (kuh-ho'-key-uh) Mounds State Historic Site in Collinsville, Illinois, just 12.8 kilometers (8 miles) east of St. Louis. Historians think 10,000 to 20,000 people may have lived here when the city was at its peak. The rulers lived in the middle of the city, which was protected by a wall. Outside the city were fields where the Native Americans grew corn, squash, pumpkin, sunflower, marsh elder, may grass, lambsquarter, and barley. They also caught huge amounts of fish from the river and nearby lakes. They hunted waterfowl and smaller animals.

Among the many accomplishments of the Mississippian Culture tribes at Cahokia was the construction of a sun calendar. The sun calendar is known today as "Woodhenge"—a circle of large red cedar posts, with a central observation post. From the central position, the rising sun aligns with certain posts on the circle's perimeter that mark important dates, such as the equinoxes and solstices.

The remains of other settlements of Mississippian Culture tribes can be seen elsewhere along the river at Emerald Mound along the Natchez Trace Parkway near Natchez, Mississippi; at the Wickliffe Mounds Research Center at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in Kentucky; and other sites.

The mound-building cultures of the river valley declined centuries before the Europeans came, but more contemporary tribes—the Chicasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez—occupied the Valley until they were pushed out by the Europeans.

Europeans Ply the Mississippi

Many people mistakenly think the Midwest was opened to Europeans much later than the East. In fact, European explorers, traders, trappers, and miners arrived in the Mississippi Valley in the 16th Century.

While Europeans were able to establish early frontier trading outposts and missions in the river valley, development of communities took much longer than it did in the East. When communities did develop, they were isolated—linked only by the river and by Indian trails.

When Hernando deSoto became the first European to reach the Mississippi in 1541, he left a legacy of horror among the Chicasaw, Choctaw, and Natchez tribes that then populated the Valley. Greedy for gold, DeSoto and his men terrorized the Native Americans. They had landed in Tampa Bay in Florida, then worked their way through north through Florida and Georgia before turning west to arrive at the Mississippi near Memphis, Tennessee.

The Appalachian mountains formed an impenetrable barrier to travel from the northeast and middle Atlantic states. Consequently, most of the later adventurers came through the wilderness the only way they could—down the Mississippi. In 1608, the year that New Amsterdam (later New York) was founded, French fur traders from Quebec paddled their birchbark canoes through interconnected northern lakes. These French fur traders and missionaries reached Wisconsin in 1634, just four years after Boston was founded in 1630.

Marquette and Jolliet reached the upper Mississippi in 1673, ten years before Charleston was founded in 1683. Jacques Marquette was a missionary, and Louis Jolliet was an explorer looking for a Northwest Passage to the Pacific. They paddled birchbark canoes from Lake Michigan as far south as the Arkansas River, and—incredibly—2,419 kilometers (1,500 miles) back north against the current. They were the first Europeans to “discover”—from personal observations and from the friendly Quapaw Indians—that the Mississippi flowed to the Gulf of Mexico, and not to the Pacific. Jolliet was disappointed. They had discovered a great transportation thoroughfare, but not the one they sought.

In 1681, the French explorer Rene-Robert La Salle canoed down the Mississippi from the Illinois River to the Gulf of Mexico. There, in 1682, he claimed the whole Mississippi Basin for France and named it Louisiana. He wanted to make French fur traders rich by using the “Great Central Waterway” as a fur trading route.

New Orleans and the Flatboat Era

In the early 1700s, Spanish and French fur traders and miners were the only Europeans in the Mississippi Valley, living alongside the Indians. By the late 1700s, British colonists arrived. New Orleans became the trading center for cotton and other raw materials headed to the East Coast or Europe. This was the colorful era of the rivermen and the flatboats. The farmers and traders built simple wooden flatboats, which were little more than rafts, and floated down river. They broke up the flatboats and sold them for firewood along with their cargo in New Orleans. They returned by foot or horseback along the Indian trails through the lands of the friendly Choctaw and Chicasaw, to the settlements near what is now Nashville, Tennessee. From there, they could find their way to the upper valley by trails through central Kentucky. Both the river and the trails were full of thieves, and travel was dangerous.

The Natchez Trace

In 1801 the government negotiated agreements with the Choctaws and Chickasaws to build a road between Nashville, Tennessee and Natchez, Mississippi. The Army widened the old Indian trails, known as the Natchez Trace. Although it served a peaceful purpose to thousands of returning flatboatmen, this road, completed in 1803, was initially conceived with strategic military ends in view, in the event the United States should become embroiled with Spain over the port of New Orleans. Today the Natchez Trace Parkway follows the original route of the old Natchez Trace.

Keelboats

By the early 1800s, keelboats began to replace flatboats. The keelboats' V-shaped hull made them more maneuverable than flatboats. More importantly, the keelboats could travel up-river. They were dragged against the current by human power, using cables or poles. It took three months to push from New Orleans to Louisville!

The Louisiana Purchase

New Orleans had become a bustling port. In 1803, Thomas Jefferson offered to purchase the city from France. To his surprise, Napoleon offered to sell him the Louisiana Territory as well, which Jefferson promptly bought, doubling the size of the United States. Jefferson sent Louis and Clark to explore for a trade route up the Missouri. They failed to find the nonexistent Northwest Passage. The Louisiana Purchase spurred settlement along the Mississippi, which became the border to the new Frontier. The European population of the Valley tripled within 7 years to more than 1 million.

The War of 1812

The Natchez Trace Parkway was an important route for General Andrew Jackson's Army of the Tennessee Volunteers during the War of 1812. Jackson was able to save New Orleans from a threatened invasion by British forces in 1815, saving the city, although, unknown to him, the war had already ended. With this important victory, the Mississippi became an American river.

Steam Fuels Commerce

In 1811, Robert Fulton's new invention, the steamboat, astonished Valley-dwellers as it traveled down the Ohio to the Mississippi, reaching New Orleans in January 1812. By making it so much easier to move people and goods, steamboats helped communities up and down the river to grow from trading outposts to thriving river cities. Each of the major river cities—New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Natchez, Memphis, St. Louis, and Minneapolis/St. Paul—developed distinct subcultures and independent economies. Many of these bustling ports enjoy the additional locational advantage of intersecting other rivers so goods can move from the Mississippi to the east or west.

The first steamboat reached St. Louis—then a frontier outpost—in 1817. Six years later, the first steamboat docked at the northern outpost of Fort Snelling, Minnesota, located near what is now Minneapolis International Airport. St. Paul, Minnesota prospered as the northern terminus of steamboat navigation up the Mississippi, becoming the state capital, while Twin City Minneapolis developed around lumber processing powered by St. Anthony's Falls on the Mississippi.

More Diverse Peoples Come to the River

Beginning in the 1840s, German and Irish immigrants began to move to the river cities, often coming to St. Louis, Memphis, or New Orleans from the larger cities of the East or North. Their way of life was very different from the Southern culture that had evolved along the river. This was to bring conflict when the Civil War broke out, especially in the border states of Kansas and Missouri.

The immigrant heritage can be seen in the picturesque river boom town of Quincy, Illinois, which dates to 1821 but grew quickly after the influx of German immigrants beginning in 1840, who had come up the river from New Orleans.

In 1839 people of the Mormon faith were mercilessly exiled from Missouri, where they had established their headquarters. Some 6,000 crossed the Mississippi at Quincy. Later settling at Nauvoo, Illinois, the Mormons in 1846 would recross the Great River and forge across Iowa (bypassing Missouri) on their epic trek to Utah. Their route can be traced from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City as the Mormon Trail, administered by the National Park Service.

The War and the River

There are no happy stories of the Civil War and the Mississippi. The transportation resource of the Mississippi was a lifeline for the agrarian South. Its closure to all traffic by Union gunboats early in the war—as part of an overall blockade of the South aimed at crippling its economy—strangled river commerce. Whether pro-Union or pro-Confederacy, residents who depended on the Mississippi for transport suffered greatly.

Southern culture prevailed along the Mississippi as far north as St. Louis, where slaves were auctioned on the steps of the Old Courthouse, and where the first Dred Scott decision was handed down. The influx of European immigrants coming up the Mississippi to cities in the river valley in the years before the American Civil War created social turmoil between native Southern sympathizers and the European newcomers, who were solidly pro-Union.

Originally a slave state, Missouri turned Union only weeks after Fort Sumter fell, because of the great German and Irish immigrant population of St. Louis clashed with the Missouri natives, drove the governor and his troops out of the city, and seized the U.S. arsenal there.

Because of the river blockade, booming St. Louis endured years of economic depression, while its rival city to the north, Chicago, prospered supplying manufactured goods and war materiel for the Union. The economy of the South ground to a halt because cotton could no longer be exported to Great Britain for processing in textile mills, depriving the south of needed hard currency.

Many slaves were able to escape north by following the river. An Underground Railroad route of hidden trails and tunnels along the river led many to freedom.

By the summer of 1862, the Union controlled most of the river, with the exception of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Vicksburg held out until the great Battle of Vicksburg in the summer of 1863. The Battle of Vicksburg is considered one of the most important in the Civil War. Along with the Battle of Gettysburg, which took place at roughly the same time in Pennsylvania, it marked the collapse of the Confederacy.

Rolling on the River

After the war the Mississippi River returned to prosperity. Great numbers of steam-powered sternwheelers plied the Mississippi, mooring in lines four and five deep along the levees of major cities.

The lore of this era is embodied in Samuel L. Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. First a river pilot, then a renowned author, Twain's tales have defined the Mississippi River experience for millions of readers around the world.

Riverboat entertainers spread new, distinctly American music genres that had developed in the isolated regions along the Mississippi: New Orleans Jazz, Memphis Blues, the brassy swing of Dixieland, and syncopated St. Louis Ragtime. Today these music forms are some of the best-known American music.

Roads in the Late 19th Century

In the late 1800s, local roads in the Mississippi river region were generally poor. They were financed by taxes on property, poll taxes, and statute labor. Very few rural residents enjoyed adequate road service. Deep sand was a problem in the South, and earth roads became quagmires when it rained. Most people were farmers at that time, and the farmers had a terrible time getting supplies to their farms and getting their goods to market. City dwellers generally enjoyed better transportation services because the city taxes financed them, but they still suffered from high prices for farm goods.

Rail Changes the River

The steam that powered the riverboats began to power a new mode of transport—the railroad.

Higher speeds and the ability to haul large tonnages at low cost gave the railroads a tremendous competitive advantage over water or road travel. The railroads siphoned off river trade as readily as they reached the river ports that were their prime destinations.

For example, the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad Company began operations in 1859, with the purpose of diverting southbound river traffic away from St. Louis to Chicago and points east. And the Illinois Central Railroad—the “St. Louis Cut-Off” as it was called by Chicago businessmen—was constructed down the spine of Illinois from Chicago to Cairo on the Mississippi with the sole purpose of intercepting northbound river traffic before it could reach St. Louis.

The railroads sparked explosive economic growth, which compensated somewhat for the loss of river trade. Most passengers now moved by railroad, but the river was still jammed with cargo during these prosperous times. Now only high-bulk materials—such as iron, coal, lumber, and manufactured goods—traveled on the river. River barges replaced the steam-powered sternwheelers.

The development of railroads, and the increasing pace of bridge-building that was taking place at the same time, linked the communities along the river to the outside world in a way that had not been possible before. The new ease of access began to blur regional distinctions and end isolation. It was the beginning of the more homogeneous nation that we know today.

The Challenge of Bridging the Mississippi

The first bridge on the river was built at Rock Island, Illinois in 1856. Until then the river had formed a barrier to development of the Western United States.

Bridges have always been lifelines across the river, enabling economic growth. For example, the great steel Eads Bridge—still the grandfather of all cantilever bridges—bridged the Mississippi at St. Louis in 1874, enabling that city to recapture lost ground. By the turn of the century trailed only Chicago in railroad commerce. Its vast Union Station, opened in 1894, became the largest and busiest railroad station in the world. Restored, it now serves as an immense and colorful shopping center.

Bridging the Mississippi has always been a challenge. Bridges must not only span the widest river on the continent, but be high enough to accommodate boat traffic. In modern times, bridge projects are often unpopular because of fears of uncontrolled development or trade rivalries. Today, increasing awareness of environmental and flood plain issues compound the technical and political difficulties surrounding bridge projects.

The Good Roads Movement

In the 1800s, local roads in the Mississippi River region were generally poor. Starting in the 1880s, there was a popular movement to build better roads. The first state road convention was held in Iowa City, Iowa in 1883, leading to state legislation passed in 1884 authorizing county boards to levy a property tax to create a road fund. It was the beginning of our nation's rural public roads system.

The Good Roads Movement gained momentum in the 1890s when bicyclists launched a national public relations campaign to whip up sentiment favorable to more and better road building. Bicyclists had to vie with horse carriages for space on the roads, and were even less able to cope with poor road conditions than the horse-powered vehicles. Later, the owners of the first automobiles faced similar problems.

Object Lesson Roads

As the Good Roads Movement became popular, officials in Washington became more interested in public roads. The U.S. Office of Road Inquiry was formed within the Department of Agriculture in 1893, an early predecessor to today's Federal Highway Administration within the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The role of the Office of Road Inquiry was to investigate and disseminate information about road technology, much as the Federal Highway Administration's research and technology programs do today. In the late 1890s, Office of Road Inquiry launched the nation's first road technology demonstration program, known as the "Object Lesson Road Program." The purpose was to convince the public of the benefit of good roads by building a small section of modern road using high-quality roadbuilding techniques. Hundreds of visitors came to see the roads, including public officials who were then more easily convinced to undertake local road projects, having seen that the local farmers and merchants supported raising public funds for decent roads. Object Lesson Road projects were conducted in cooperation with agricultural colleges in the Mississippi River region and throughout the nation.

The Lincoln Highway

By 1913, the emergence of the automobile had inspired interest in interstate roads. The Lincoln Highway Association was formed that year to support a “coast-to-coast rock highway” to be paid for by public subscriptions. In order to raise sufficient funds, the association adopted the techniques that had been used in the Object Lesson Road Program. They used initial donations to finance “seedling miles” distributed throughout the length of the coast-to-coast route. The first of these, built in October 1914 near the village of Malta, Illinois, was a cement concrete pavement suitable for heavy traffic. The “seedling mile” projects succeeded in attracting more interest in funding public roads, and nurtured the beginning of the federal aid highway system.

Between 1920 and World War II, paved roads replaced dirt roads and trails in the Mississippi Valley and throughout the rest of the country. The nation’s road system began to take the form that we know today.

The Modern Era: Interstates and Aviation

When the nation returned to peace at the end of World War II, it was able to turn its attention to one of its major domestic problems: safety and traffic on the roads, especially in the cities. After the war there was a tremendous increase in car ownership, leading to road congestion that threatened the national economy, because trucks caught in traffic couldn’t move goods to market reliably. President Dwight Eisenhower called for an upgraded national Interstate Highway System... “a properly articulated system that solves the problems of speedy, safe, transcontinental travel-intercity communication-across highways-and farm-to-market movement-metropolitan area congestion-bottlenecks-and parking.” The passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 funded the Interstate system we know today, which has dramatically affected our way of life by bringing the 49 North American states closer together both economically and culturally.

During the same post-war period, the emergence of the aviation sector as an important means of moving people and goods between cities is continuing the trend toward cultural and economic integration, on a global scale.

The river continues to move goods, but few passengers. The Mississippi provides transport for more than 472 million tons of cargo each year, including 46 percent of the grain exported from the United States. A system of 29 locks and dams control navigation on the Upper Mississippi between Minneapolis and St. Louis.

The diversified and globally linked economies of Mississippi Valley cities no longer depend solely on the river, as they have in the past. Instead, the river is where we go to relax and remember the rich heritage the river has brought us. More than 3 million people each year visit the state-managed parks and natural areas along the river. Visitors also enjoy 1,100 significant National Historic Register sites, beautiful scenery, wonderful food, hospitality, and entertainment along the banks of the mighty Mississippi. Many choose to travel along The Great River Road, which follows the Mississippi River on both sides from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, and is one of the oldest and longest scenic byways in the United States. A traveler can follow the Great River Road more than 4,800 kilometers (3,000 miles) through ten states and the two Canadian provinces of Ontario and Manitoba, savoring the rich historical heritage of the nation’s greatest river.

QUESTIONS FOR GRADES 10 THROUGH 12

- How long is the Mississippi River?
- Which states does it flow thorough?
- What is a flyway?
- Who were the first humans to come to the Mississippi River?
- What types of buildings did the Mississippian Culture Indians elevate on earthen mounds?
- What is Woodhenge?
- What is Stonehenge?
- What tribes occupied the Mississippi River valley when the Europeans came?
- Is it correct to think that American history began on the East Coast?
- Which European nations came first to the Mississippi River Valley?
- In what period? How did they travel?
- Why did they come so early to the future nation's interior?
- What did they do once they got there?
- What were the first products to be brought out of the nation's interior?
- Why were they valuable?
- How did the products reach market?
- Name three methods of transportation on the Mississippi River.
- What was the Louisiana Purchase?
- Who engineered it and why?
- What was the impact of the Louisiana Purchase on the Mississippi River Valley and commerce?
- What commerce spurred early development of the Mississippi Valley and how did the river play a role?
- What is the Natchez Trace?
- During what war did the British threaten New Orleans?
- What famous American defeated the British at New Orleans?
- Who invented the steamboat?
- When was the steamboat invented?
- What effect did it have on the river?
- When did Irish and German immigrants come to the river?
- What affect did they have on life there?
- Who are the Mormons?

- Why did they leave Missouri?
- What happened along the river during the Civil War?
- Why was the Battle of Vicksburg important?
- What was the Underground Railroad?
- Name some of the books written by Mark Twain.
- Name some of the different types of music that was developed in cities along the Mississippi.
- What were roads like in the late 1800s?
- How did railroads change the river?
- What is a cantilever bridge?
- Why was it important to build bridges across the river?
- What was the Good Roads Movement?
- What was an Object Lesson Road?
- What was the Lincoln Highway?
- When did the nation's road system take shape?
- Which President encourage Congress to build the Interstate Highway System?
- What is the Great River Road?

ACTIVITIES FOR GRADES 10 THROUGH 12

Listen to the music of the Mississippi and discuss the different musical styles.

Locate the major cities of the Mississippi on a map and discuss what caused each city to grow.

Take a field trip to a wildlife refuge along the Mississippi and learn about how the ecology of the river affects life along its banks, and vice versa.

