

RIVER STORIES

Retell a story you heard today as if you were there when it happened!

Mark Twain, more than anyone else, celebrated America's rich river history. Not only was he a great writer, he was also a dynamic storyteller who made his living telling stories and giving lectures. Mark



Twain had a very personable style of bringing the story to life with vocal inflection, gesture, and his brilliant, witty use of the language. Go to the library and find one of Twain's short stories. "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County", "The Ghost with the Golden Arm", and "The War Prayer", are a few of my favorite Twain stories. When you find one you like read the story out loud several times to get a feel for it. Experiment with different voices, pacing and tone, sound effects and dramatic inflection as you read it out loud. Stand up and act it out. Close your eyes and see the story in your imagination. Do not memorize the words. Remember the outline of the story and use your own words. Practice, practice, PRACTICE. When you think you have it, tell it to your class.

Beyond Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, America has a diverse tradition of river related folklore characters, real and imagined. Mike Fink was a keelboat man who was half alligator, half horse. Annie Christmas was an African-American woman who single-handedly pulled a steamboat out of a storm. Look for Carl Jugendorf's Sand in the Bag, or B.A. Botkin's A Treasury of Mississippi Folklore. Both books contain some wonderful tales of America's rivers that you could learn and tell. Or better yet, write your own tall tale about an adventure you had on the river wrestling alligators or catching a 200 lb. catfish.



Find a good map of your neighborhood, city, state and country. Use these four maps to trace the route you would take if you paddled a canoe from your house to the ocean. Make a list of what cities you would pass, what states you would go through, and what the terrain would look like along the way. Imagine making this journey. Write an imaginary journal charting how many miles you could paddle each day. What adventures would you have? What problems might you encounter? What might you learn about river ecology, geology, bird migrations, fish populations, amphibian and insect relationships? What might you learn about American history? Write a story that brings these lessons to life for your reader.

The rivers of America are time lines that trace the rich layers of our history. From the Ancient Americans to the first pioneers, from fur trappers to modern barge pilots, America's rivers have played an important role in our history and economics. Think about these layers of history as layers of a cake. Think like an archeologist; dig down through each layer of your local history. Who lived here before you? Who lived here before then? How did the rivers bring them here? Using your canoe as a time machine write a poem or story about your travels through these layers of river history.



Rivers are also a great place to study the strata of geological history. River bluffs reveal layers of the earth's past; layers of limestone reveal an ancient sea bottom with fossils. River stones could have been carried from hundreds of miles away and made hundreds of millions of years ago. Go down to the river and collect some stones. Learn the stories they could tell.

Rewrite, edit, and type your stories to share with your class.