

THE RIVER SPEAKS

Companion Teaching Activities to the historical fiction serialized story

“THE RIVER SPEAKS”

Teaching Activities written by

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Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both from Neosho, MO. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation, ©2009

The River Speaks

By Kay Hively

“The River Speaks” is a historical fiction story that takes place in 1856. This story is a great springboard for discussions about United States history and geography and offers many great writing opportunities.

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Create a Book

“The River Speaks” will be published in the newspaper one chapter at a time. Have students create their own books with the chapters of the story.

Materials Needed:

- Newspapers
- Newsprint or Construction Paper
- Glue
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Crayons, Markers, or Colored Pencils
- Table of Contents Worksheet
- Glossary Worksheet
- Stapler, yarn and whole punch, or any other materials you’d like to use to bind the book together

Steps for creating the book:

1. Create a cover for the book with the title, author, name of the book creator, and picture.
2. Create a simple title page with the title and author.
3. Put the book pages in order
 - Cover
 - Title Page
 - Table of Contents
 - 4 Blank Sheets (paste chapters on these as you read them)
 - Glossary of Terms
 - Back Cover
4. Bind the pages together.
5. Each week cut and paste the new chapter into the book and complete the Table of Contents and glossary excerpts.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: _____

Chapter 2: _____

Chapter 3: _____

Chapter 4: _____

Chapter 5: _____

Chapter 6: _____

Chapter 7: _____

Chapter 8: _____

Glossary

Directions: Write the definitions to the following terms that can be found in the story. Because most words have more than one meaning, just record the definition that pertains to this story.

boiler _____

bow _____

clerk _____

debris _____

galley _____

grits _____

overwhelmed _____

pouch _____

steamboat _____

satchel _____

snag _____

stern _____

timid _____

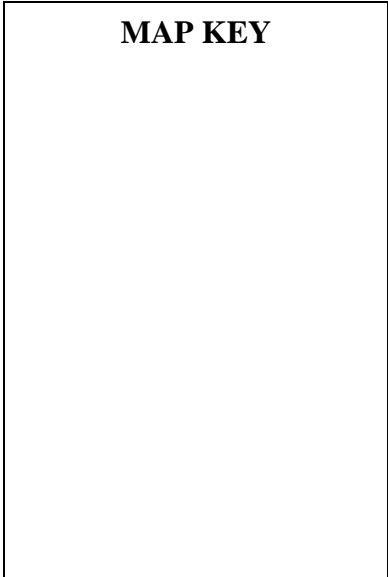
usher _____

“The River Speaks”—Geography

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Create a map of the United States geographic locations mentioned in this story. Make a map key for the following geographic locations then label your map.

- Fort Leavenworth
- Sioux City
- Yellowstone Country (Yellowstone National Park)
- Rocky Mountains
- New Orleans
- St. Louis
- Memphis
- Cincinnati
- California
- City of Kansas (Kansas City)
- Missouri River
- Mississippi River



Reading Connections

Before reading:

1. Discuss the title. What does it mean to you?
2. Make a prediction for the story.
3. Study Missouri history for the 1850s to gain background knowledge.

During reading:

1. Complete the context clues chart.
2. After each chapter, write a short summary in your own words and include an illustration.
3. Give each chapter your own “subtitle.”

After reading:

1. Create a book cover for the story. Be sure to include a brief description of the book and some reviews on the back cover! Explain why you chose the words and illustrations on your cover.
2. Discuss the use of the following literary terms in the story: characterization, foreshadowing, theme, imagery, setting, and plot. Find specific examples of each.
3. Rewrite the short story as a screenplay and assign roles to the class.
4. Reflect on the story: write a poem or a song, create a model of your favorite scene, interview your favorite character, etc.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 1 Name _____ Date _____

1. The story takes place in 1856. Compare and Contrast 1856 to today in regards to the following categories. You may use reference materials to help you.

1856	In Regards To	Today
	Transportation	
	Clothing	
	Shelter	
	Communication	

2. Toby learned how to tell time from the sun? How is that possible? Explain.

3. Toby had never been 20 miles from his home. Locate the city where you live on a map and trace a 20-mile radius. Name the cities within a 20-mile radius of your home.

4. Toby’s father cut and sold firewood along the river. Would this be a good business for him? Explain your answer.

Writing Connection:

- Research important events from 1856. Write a front page news story for a newspaper during that time period.

Newspaper Connection:

- Locate pictures and words that show signs of the season in the newspaper. Cut and paste them to create a collage.
- Write five headlines that would be found in a newspaper during the 1856 period.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 1 Name _____ Date _____

Discuss:

How did Toby build his body and mind? Why is this balance important? What is the biggest adventure he has experienced so far?

1. What do you think Toby’s riverboat ride will be like? Why?

2. Imagine you are Toby. What would you say to your friends about your upcoming adventure?

3. Locate Ft. Leavenworth and Sioux City on a map. Calculate the distance from your hometown.

Newspaper Connection: Look through today’s newspaper. Do you see any lures for an adventure? What type of adventure is it? Share your response with the class.

Character Focus: *Hard Work.* The author states that Toby wasn’t scared of hard work. How do you think most 11 year olds feel about hard work? What are the advantages and disadvantages of hard work? What is the hardest work you have ever done?

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 2 Name _____ Date _____

1. Toby was excited to ride on a steamboat for the first time. Describe a time when you rode something for the first time.

2. Toby’s father said he needed some sea legs. What does that mean?

3. How many pounds is 200 tons of cargo? _____

4. Why did Toby feel that Captain Bill was a hero?

5. What was the importance of Mr. LePage’s job on the steamboat?

Writing Prompt:

- Captain Bill was Toby’s hero. Write an essay about one of your personal heroes.

Newspaper Connection:

- There were many jobs involved with running a steamboat. Locate help wanted ads for jobs pertaining to transportation today.
- Steamboats were a popular form of transportation during the 1800s. Locate pictures of modern day transportation in the newspaper. Cut and paste the pictures on a piece of paper. Circle the form of transportation that would most likely transport cargo today and write a sentence explaining your choice.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 2 Name _____ Date _____

Discuss: Why did the boat ride make Toby feel disoriented? Why do you think most boys idolized riverboat captains?

1. Describe the living quarters on the steamboat. How do you think these compare to modern boats?

2. Why do you think Toby could only say “thanks” when he met the riverboat captain?

3. Explain Mike’s job as a captain boy.

Newspaper Connection: The LePage family had an important job on the ship. Look in the newspaper to find other examples of “important jobs.” Why do you consider these jobs valuable?

Character Focus: *Honor.* To think of someone as a hero is to honor them. What does it take to be a hero today? How do you think that has changed since the mid 1800s?

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 3 Name _____ Date _____

1. How much wood was needed to power the steamboat?

2. List the steamboat’s cargo. Name at least three other objects that would be typically found on a steamboat in 1858.

3. What simile is used to describe the cargo on the boat?

4. Create your own simile to describe the cargo on the boat.

5. Why were Mike and Toby afraid of the gamblers?

Writing Connection:

- Predict what you think will happen next, and write your own chapter 3 to the story. Compare your chapter with your classmates’.

Newspaper Connection:

- Locate at least three similes in the newspaper. Cut and paste them to a piece of paper and write a sentence describing the meaning of each.
- The author says “Toby was overwhelmed and timid.” Locate a picture of someone who looks overwhelmed or timid in the newspaper. Describe why you think he/she exhibits those qualities.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 3 Name _____ Date _____

Discuss: Why was Toby surprised at the amount of wood needed to fuel the Steamboat Arabia? What type of freight does he see on board? In what way does the cargo surprise Toby?

1. Visualize what the gamblers may have looked like. Draw a picture of this scene.

2. The Arabia was carrying boots, lamps, nails, and coffee beans. What items are carried today?

3. Why do you think the gambler was so well-dressed?

Newspaper Connection: Toby used wood to heat his house. How are houses heated today? Find advertisements in the newspaper for heating companies.

Character Focus: *Resolving Conflict.* What causes people to fight? How can you prevent a fight or argument? What can you do to resolve a disagreement?

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 4 Name _____ Date _____

1. What does tongue tied mean? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2. What terms name the following parts of a boat?

- Rear end of the boat _____
- Forward end of the boat _____
- Where food is prepared _____
- Where fire is built to power the boat _____

3. How long is it from the rear end to the forward end of the Arabia? _____

4. What would you do if you had a pouch full of gold?

5. Compare and contrast woodsmen to firemen in the story. State one way they are alike and one way they are different.

Writing Connection:

- The gambler carried a pistol. Do you think he should be allowed to carry a gun? Write a persuasive paragraph for or against gun control.

Newspaper Connection:

- The phrase “tongue tied” is an example of alliteration. Circle examples of alliteration in the newspaper.
- Cut out words from the newspaper beginning with the same initial letter (ex. “s” words). Arrange words to make a tongue twister. Paste your tongue twister on a sheet of paper and draw an illustration to go with it.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 4 Name _____ Date _____

Discuss: Why was Toby tongue tied? Why do you think Toby kept thinking about the pouch of gold?

1. Why are Toby and his father called woodsmen?

2. Why does Toby say he does not understand “riverboat language?”

3. Why did Toby think his father might be mad at him? How does Mr. LePage show Toby he is not angry?

Newspaper Connection: The steamboat passengers are anxious for dinner. Use the newspaper to shop for a dinner favorite for your family. How much will it cost for the meal? How much will it cost if you double the meal for company?

Character Focus: *Responsibility.* What has Toby learned about responsibility? How does he show that he is responsible?

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 5 Name _____ Date _____

1. Why didn't the captain run the boat at night? Be specific.

2. What did the passengers of the Arabia do at night?

3. Name an example of personification used in this chapter. Give at least three other examples of personification.

4. Johnny Waters is described as a fine storyteller. Who is your favorite story teller? Why do you like his/her stories?

Writing Connection:

- Research the California Gold Rush. Write a paper describing the joys and hardships of mining during that time.

Newspaper Connection:

- Locate and circle examples of personification in the newspaper.
- Johnny talks about all of the places he'd been. Skim through the newspaper to find words and pictures of places you've been. Cut and paste the words in a timeline.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 5 Name _____ Date _____

Discuss: How did nighttime on the boat differ from daytime?

1. Describe snags. Why are they significant?

2. Why was Toby no longer afraid of the gambler?

3. What is the mood of this chapter? How does the author create the mood?

Newspaper Connection: Toby loved listening to the gambler’s exciting stories. Use the newspaper to find an example of an exciting story. What makes it exciting?

Character Focus: *Riches.* Johnny Waters is seeking his fortune at the California gold rush. Some people feel they are rich because of their families, hobbies, pets, jobs, etc. How do you consider yourself to be rich? What type of riches would you rather have? Why?

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 6 Name _____ Date _____

1. The author said that Toby fell asleep before he heard the river speak. How do you think the river will speak?

2. If the Arabia was heading upriver from Kansas City, what would be the next big city they would pass? _____

3. Search the Internet for candy that was made in the 1800s. What kind of candy do you think Mr. LePage purchased and how much do you think each piece cost?

4. Name at least three things that Toby and his father may have seen in the General Store that we would no longer see in stores today.

5. Use details from the story to describe Toby’s personality.

Writing Connection:

- Where would you recommend visitors of your city to visit? Create a brochure of your city.

Newspaper Connection:

- In the newspaper, locate pictures and words of things that would have been sold in a general store. Cut and paste them on a piece of paper, then describe how the modern version is different than the 1800 version (such as packaging, how it is sold, or improvements made).
- Wood is still an important natural resource. In the newspaper, locate pictures of things that are made from wood.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 6 Name _____ Date _____

Discuss: Why was everyone at breakfast happy? As the setting changed, how did this chapter change?

1. Why was everyone so anxious to see the town?

2. Why do you think Johnny Waters was the last one on board?

3. Research “Westport Landing.” Does it still exist in Kansas City today?

Newspaper Connection: Toby marveled at all of the buildings he saw in Kansas City. What type of buildings can you find in the newspaper? How do these buildings compare with those of 1800s?

Character Focus: *Promise.* Toby and his father made a promise to work hard and earn their ride on the steamboat. They also promised to return to the boat after a brief visit to the stores. How did they show that they can be trusted? Why is it important to keep your promises?

1. How did Toby feel about his trip on the Arabia? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

2. What do you think caused the boat to sink? Explain.

3. What do you think Toby will do with Johnny Waters’ gold nugget pouch? What would you do if you found something valuable? Explain your answer.

4. How did Toby hear “the river speak?” Use details from the story to explain your answer.

5. Predict how you think the story will end.

Writing Connection:

- Pretend you are Toby and write a journal entry about your riverboat adventure.

Newspaper Connection:

- Mr. LePage did a heroic deed by helping the passengers get to safety. Locate and cut out a picture or story from the newspaper of someone doing a heroic deed. Write a paragraph describing how that person helped others.
- Write a newspaper ad describing something you lost.

Discuss: Describe the sinking of Steamboat Arabia. Were you surprised at this event? Why?

1. Imagine you are Toby. What would you say to your father as you part ways to swim to shore?

2. How were the passengers rescued?

3. Write a newspaper headline about the sinking of the ship.

Newspaper Connections: The sinking of the steamboat was a tragedy. What forms of tragedy can you find in today’s news? How do people cope? What solutions are available?

Character Focus: *Focus.* Mr. LePage and the riverboat captain kept their focus in a time of trial. What kind of trials have you faced? How did you keep your focus? What did you learn to help you in the future?

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 8 Name _____ Date _____

1. Who was the last one off the sinking boat? Why do you think he was last?

2. Where was the baggage stored for the night? Do you think that was a good spot for it? Why or why not?

3. How did Johnny Waters thank Toby?

4. What did the river tell Toby?

5. What life lessons do you think Toby learned from his steamboat adventure? Use details from the story to explain your answer.

Writing Connection:

- Pretend you are a reporter for the Kansas City newspaper in 1856. Write a short article about the Arabia steamboat sinking. Be sure to include WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY and HOW in your article.

Newspaper Connection:

- Locate a picture of someone being acknowledged for a good deed in your local newspaper. Describe the good deed and how he/she is acknowledged.
- Find a recent example of a “river speaking” in your local newspaper.

“The River Speaks”—Chapter 8 Name _____ Date _____

Discuss: Which of your predictions were correct? What did you like best about this story?

1. How does a river speak?

2. If you were the captain, how would you have stored the valuables for the evening?

3. Do you think Toby will change after his riverboat experience? How so?

Newspaper Connection: Many passengers were grateful to Toby and his father for their help during the rescue. Use the newspaper to find examples of ways that people can say “thank you.”

Character Focus: *Honesty.* Toby was honest and returned the pouch of gold. Why is it important for people to be honest? What is the most valuable item you have found? What did you do?