

# THE RIVER SPEAKS

CHAPTER 1 -  
BY KAY HIVELY

**T**oby LePage groaned a sigh of relief as he laid the last log on the big woodpile. Even though he was only 11 years old, Toby was strong and muscular. Working with his father in the timber had built up his body. And every night at home his mother had been a good teacher, building up his brain.

It was September 1856, and already there were signs of autumn along the banks of the Missouri River.

As he rested on top of the stack of wood, looking across the river, Toby thought about what his father had once told him. Mr. LePage said that the river speaks. But at that moment, the only thing Toby heard was his father's voice. Toby could see the lumber wagon coming along the river bank. Quickly Toby ran to meet his father.

As Mr. LePage pulled on the reins, Bill and Lilly, the

two big horses, stopped. Toby jumped onto the wagon seat beside his father, and the wagon wheels began to roll forward. With their work done, both men and beasts were glad to go home.

Toby was happy to finish work early. He had learned to tell time by the setting sun, and he knew it would be another hour before dark.

As father and son rode home together, Mr. LePage complimented his son on his good work in the woods. He said there was enough wood stacked up to make a big load for the steamboat *Arabia* that would stop the next day.

Ever since Toby could remember, his father had cut and sold firewood along the river. Most of it was sold to steamboat captains who were hauling passengers and freight up the Missouri.

Toby enjoyed working in the woods, but he wondered what it would be like to ride

on a steamboat. Since he had never been more than 20 miles from the family cabin, he thought that traveling up and down the river would be exciting. His biggest adventure had been a trip to the crossroads

general store to buy supplies.

Riding home with his father, he thought about going up river to see Fort Leavenworth or Sioux City. Even more exciting would be going all the way up to the Yellowstone country. He had heard about the gold mining camps in the Rocky Mountains.

Toby's thoughts were interrupted by his father, who asked if he would like a riverboat ride. Toby's eyes lit up, because that was just what he was thinking. Quickly he said it would be a fine thing to do.

That's when Mr. LePage made his announcement. Snapping the reins over Bill's and Lilly's backs, Toby's father said the captain of the *Arabia* had invited them to go up river.

When the boat arrived tomorrow and the wood was loaded, Mr. LePage said they would stay on board. He also said they would have to work on the boat in exchange for the trip.

Hard work did not scare Toby. Anything for a riverboat ride.

## NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER 2 - READY TO RIDE

### Things to Think About and Do

1. Can you tell what time it is by using the sun? Research how Toby might have done this.
2. Toby has never traveled more than 20 miles from his family's cabin. On a map of your state, use a drawing compass and the mileage key to draw a circle 20 miles from where you live. Have you traveled outside that circle? Discuss why your answer might be different from Toby's experience.
3. Use your map to find the advertiser in the newspaper who is the furthest from your school. Would people in 1856 have traveled that far to get the product or service advertised? Would they have needed it?

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

