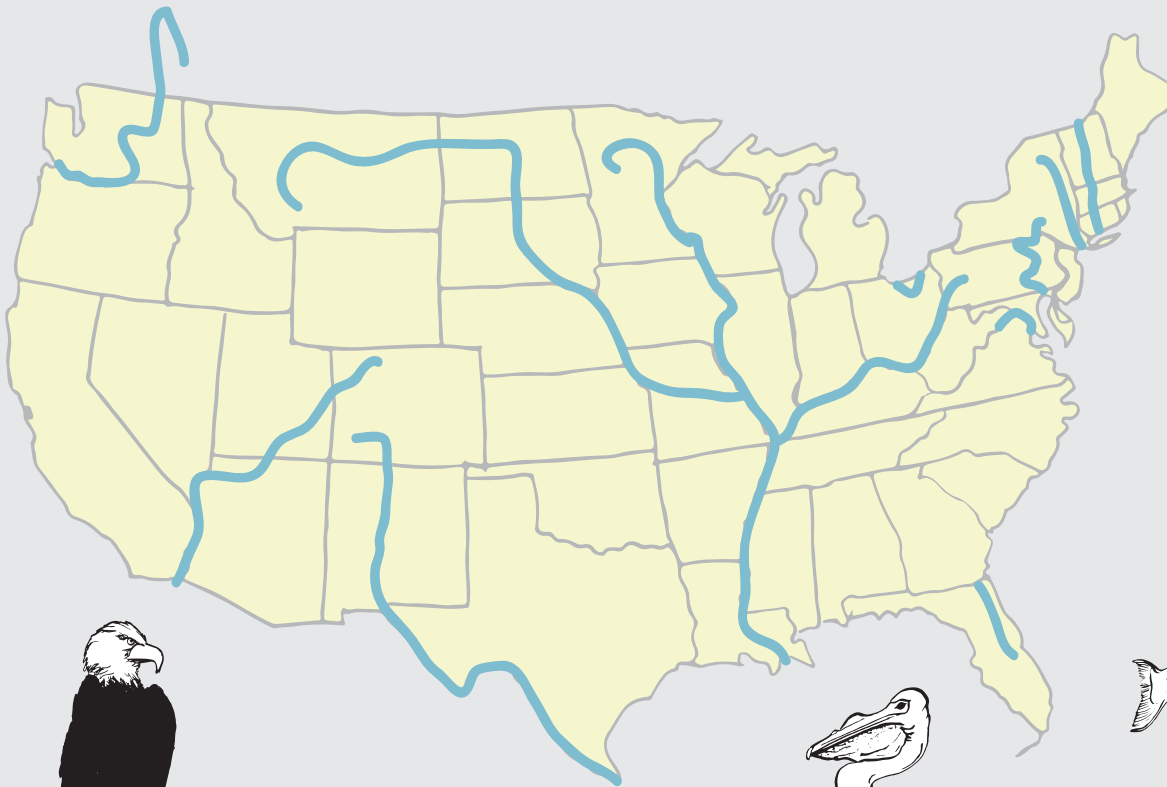
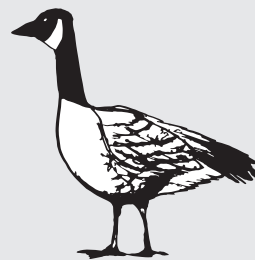
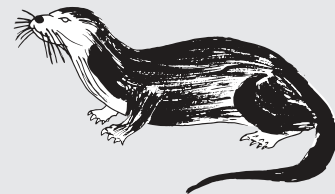
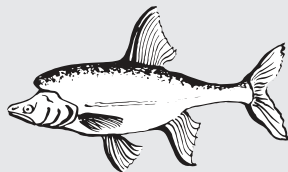


# American Rivers

4<sup>th</sup>  
Grade



Learn fun river facts like which river is home to each of these animals!



# Table of Contents

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## American Rivers

- What is a River? \*
- The Missouri River
- The Mississippi River
- The Culture of the Mississippi \*
- The Hudson River
- The Rio Grande
- The Colorado River
- The Potomac River
- The Ohio River
- River Boats \*
- St. Johns River
- The Susquehanna River
- The Columbia River
- The Connecticut River
- The Cuyahoga River
- Label the Rivers \*
- Match the River to Its Meaning \*
- How Are Rivers Formed? A Science Experiment
- River Wildlife \*
- Ten Ways to Keep Rivers Clean and Healthy

*Certificate of Completion*

*Answer Sheets*


*\* Has an Answer Sheet*

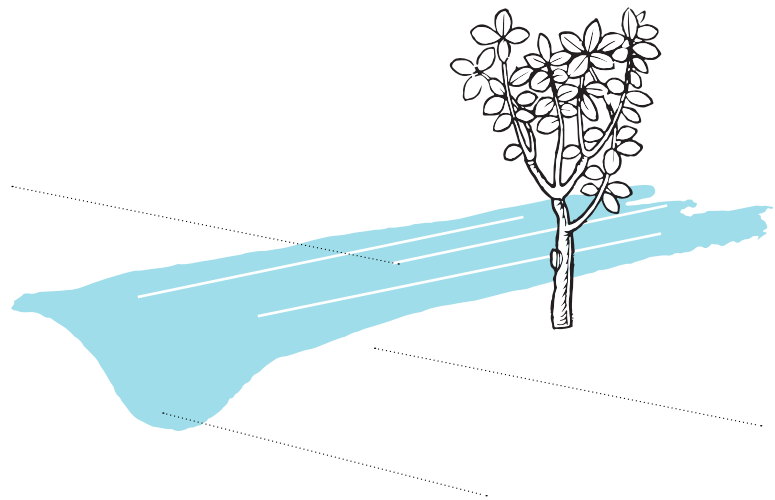
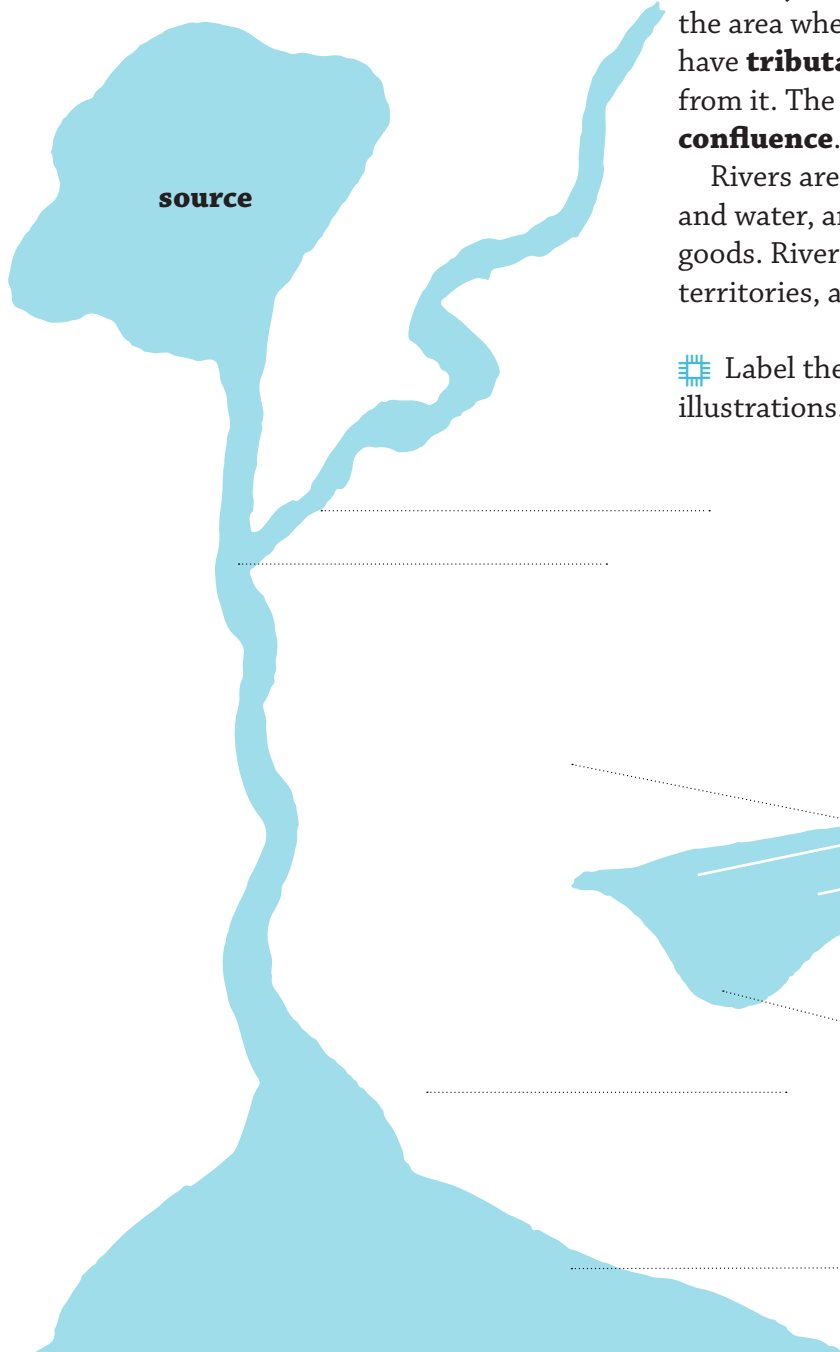
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# What is a River?

**A** RIVER IS A MOVING BODY OF WATER that flows toward an ocean, lake, or another river. The place where a river starts is called a **source**. Rivers usually flow out from a spring, snow melt or lake. Rivers flow, sometimes for miles, until they reach their **mouth**, or the place where it joins another body of water. The land surrounding a river is called a **bank**, and the bottom of it is called a **bed**. A **channel** is an area that contains flowing water confined by banks, usually a groove in the land that a river flows along. At the mouth of a river there is usually a **delta**, or a flat area of silt surrounding the area where the river branches off. Most rivers have **tributaries**, or other rivers that branch off from it. The place where two rivers meet is called a **confluence**.

Rivers are important to us. They give us food and water, and make it easier for us to transport goods. Rivers can provide easy borders for states and territories, and provide protection.

 Label the different parts of a river on the two illustrations.



# The Missouri River



**A**T 2,540 MILES LONG, the Missouri River is the longest river in the United States. The Missouri River is actually a tributary of the Mississippi, as it joins the Mississippi at St. Louis. From there it passes through cities like Kansas City, Omaha, and Bismarck. It begins in the Rocky Mountains of Montana, where three streams join together, and has several major tributaries such as the Cheyenne and Big Sioux rivers.

The Missouri River played a big part in Westward Expansion, when the U.S. was looking to grow the country. Because its course points away from the Mississippi, toward the West, it was an easy route for Lewis & Clark to follow, and their party became the first explorers to travel the course of the river. The river soon became an important route for fur traders, as many animals with desirable pelts, like beavers and otters, lived in the area; plus, the river provided easy transportation of the furs.

People have depended on the Missouri for food and transportation for thousands of years. The Lower Missouri, or the area closer to St. Louis, is a booming industrial and agriculture region, but the water in most areas of the river is too dirty to be of much use to people.

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Cities Along It: \_\_\_\_\_

Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Mississippi River



Great Blue Heron

**T**HE MISSISSIPPI RIVER is probably the most famous river in America. The Mississippi River runs from Minnesota and ends in the Gulf of Mexico, and was the main transportation route of the United States for many years. The Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers join to form the longest river system in the U.S. and the fourth-longest in the world. Its name comes from *misi-ziibi*, an Ojibwe word that means “Big River.”

“The Mighty Mississippi” starts small—in a little lake in Minnesota called Lake Itasca. It moves on to meander past several major American cities—Minneapolis, St. Paul, St. Louis, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans—bringing them water and hydroelectric power for their homes and businesses. It feeds several other major rivers, like the Missouri and the Ohio. Though most people estimate it to be around 2,300 miles long, no one can agree on how long the Mississippi actually is!

The area around the Mississippi is one of the country’s best agricultural regions, with farmers depending on the water and the minerals it brings to nourish their crops. The Mississippi is also home to several species of fish and waterfowl that thrive on it.

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Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Culture of the Mississippi



*The Bolden Band in 1905, an important part of early jazz in New Orleans*

**M**ARK TWAIN TRAVELED IT, songs have been written about it, and humans have depended on it for thousands of years. The Mississippi holds a special place in American society for being an important river and also for having its own unique culture. The cities and towns along the river's course have introduced the country to some of its most famous food, music, and festivals.

Native Americans settled on its banks thousands of years ago, and depended on its wildlife and waters for food, shelter, and trade. In the 1800s, Westward expansion and the steamboat craze caused citizens to flock to the Mississippi River Valley. Running right through the agricultural heart of the country at the time, the area around the Mississippi River became one of the most popular places to live in America.

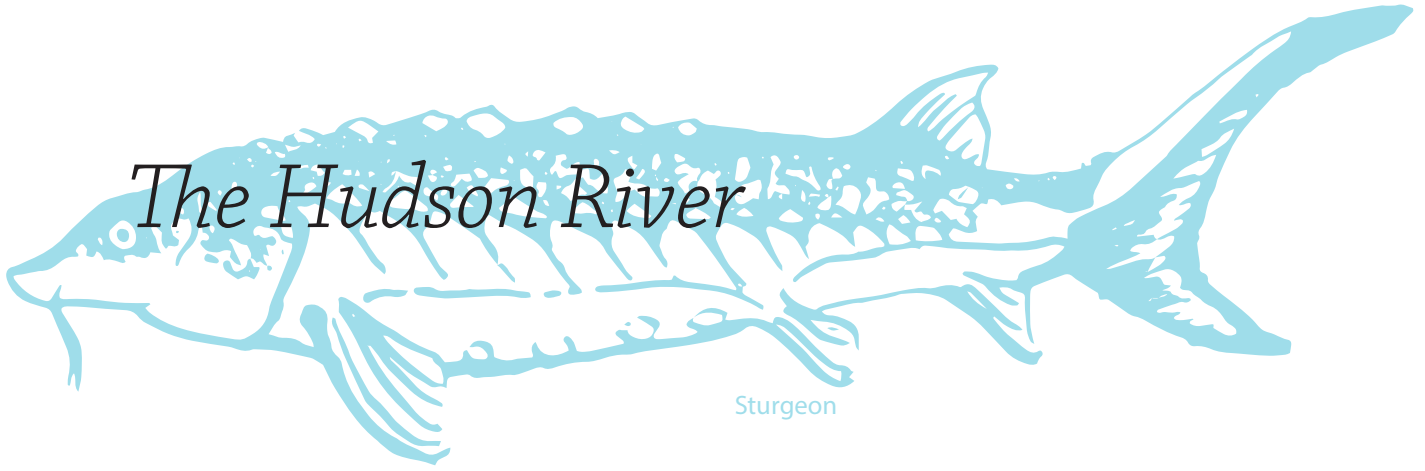
Food around the Mississippi River depends heavily on the natural resources around it. In Wisconsin and Minnesota, walleye, which can be found in Northern U.S. lakes and rivers, is a popular fish to eat, and wild rice grown along river banks is a popular dish. Frybread, a type of fried dough based on recipes used by Native Americans in the area, is also well-known. The fertile soil around the Mississippi grows great corn and vegetables in Iowa and Illinois. Barbecue flourishes in St. Louis, and in the south, Cajun and Creole cooking rely on seafood from the gulf and spices from the cultures that settled in the area.

Many kinds of music have been made by the communities that settled along the Mississippi over the years. European immigrants on its northern banks perfected polka and fiddle-based folk, while a melting pot of cultures from all over the world fused to form jazz and the blues—and the beginnings of rock 'n' roll—in the Louisiana delta.

🔗 Using what you've read, answer the questions below.

1. What region did jazz come from?
  - A The entire Mississippi valley.
  - B The Louisiana delta.
  - C Davenport, Iowa.
2. Where along the Mississippi are you likely to find good barbecue?
  - A St. Louis
  - B Minneapolis
  - C New Orleans
3. Where does frybread come from?
  - A A Native American recipe.
  - B A traditional European snack.
  - C The grocery store.

# The Hudson River



**T**HE HUDSON RIVER IS THE MAJOR waterway of New York. The Hudson is 315 miles long and flows through most of Eastern New York, emptying into New York Harbor. Because it flows through the heart of New York City, it has become one of the most famous rivers in America. The Hudson River forms the boundary between New York and northern New Jersey. Its major tributary is the Mohawk River.

The river is named after explorer Henry Hudson, who explored the river in 1609. Though it goes on for over 300 miles and passes many major cities and

towns like Troy, Albany, Hoboken, Jersey City, and New York City, the Hudson starts in a tiny lake in Northern New York called Lake Tear of the Clouds.

The area around it, the Hudson River Valley, is known to be one of the most scenic in the country. The Erie Canal connects the Hudson River with the Great Lakes, making shipping easier and faster.

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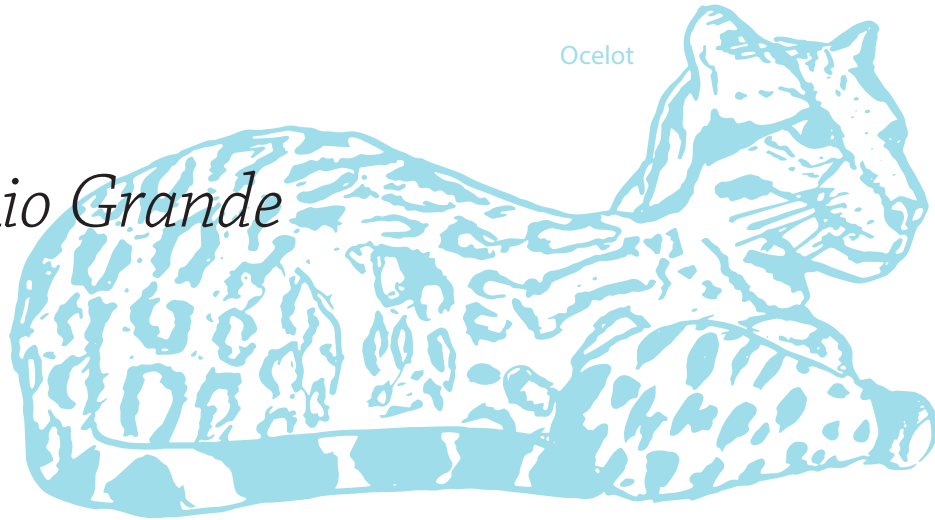
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Cities Along It: \_\_\_\_\_

Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

Ocelot



# The Rio Grande

**T**HE RIO GRANDE IS ONE OF THE MAJOR rivers of the Southwestern United States. Rio Grande is Spanish for “Big River.” The Rio Grande flows through Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas before entering Mexico and emptying into the Gulf. At around 1,880 miles long, it is the fifth longest river in the U.S.

The Rio Grande begins in the mountains of Colorado, where several streams join to make the start of the Rio Grande. Its main tributaries include the Pecos and Puerco rivers in the United States, and the San Juan in Mexico. It passes through big

southwestern cities like Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and El Paso.

The Rio Grande follows much of the border between The United States and Mexico, and was a popular steamboat route in the 19th century. The United States and Mexico share the water in the river as a result of agreements made between the two countries. Both countries depend on it for drinking water. The river and the land around it support a vast variety of fish and bird species.

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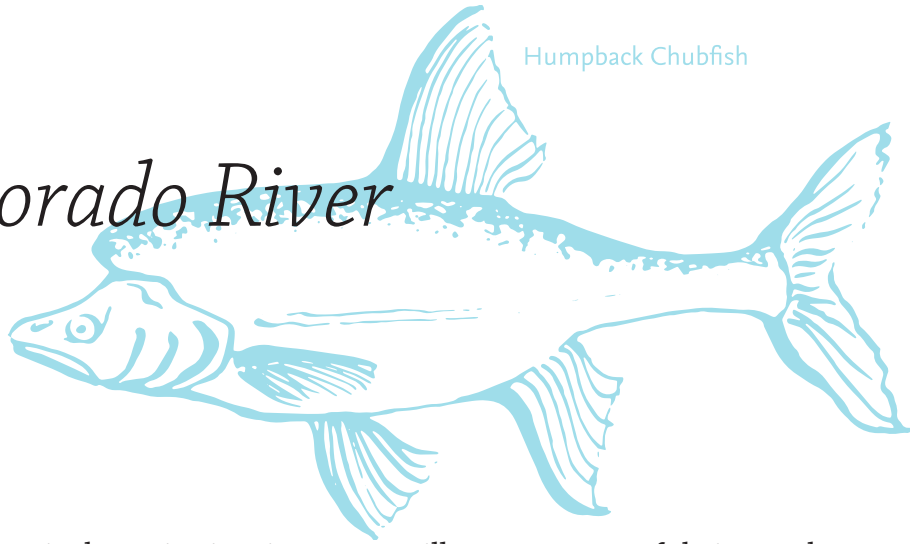
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Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

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Humpback Chubfish

# The Colorado River



**T**HE COLORADO RIVER is the main river in the southwestern United States. Starting in the Rocky Mountains, it is 1,450 miles as it passes through desert cities like Grand Junction, CO and Moab, Utah before entering the Grand Canyon. It keeps coursing toward Arizona, where it is joined by the Gila River. The course ends at the Gulf of California.

Over millions of years, the Colorado River carved out the Grand Canyon. People have depended on it for millions of years. The ancient Anasazi people used the area around it to store food and supplies—you

can still see remnants of their storehouses carved into the rock alongside the river today.

The Colorado is known for its pretty scenery and recreation. It's a great place to go whitewater rafting, and it is near 11 different national parks. Though it's beautiful, it's currently endangered: It has been used so much by humans that by the time it reaches the Gulf, it is dry. As more and more people move to the areas around it, more people need to use the water it provides for drinking, cleaning, growing food, and making things.

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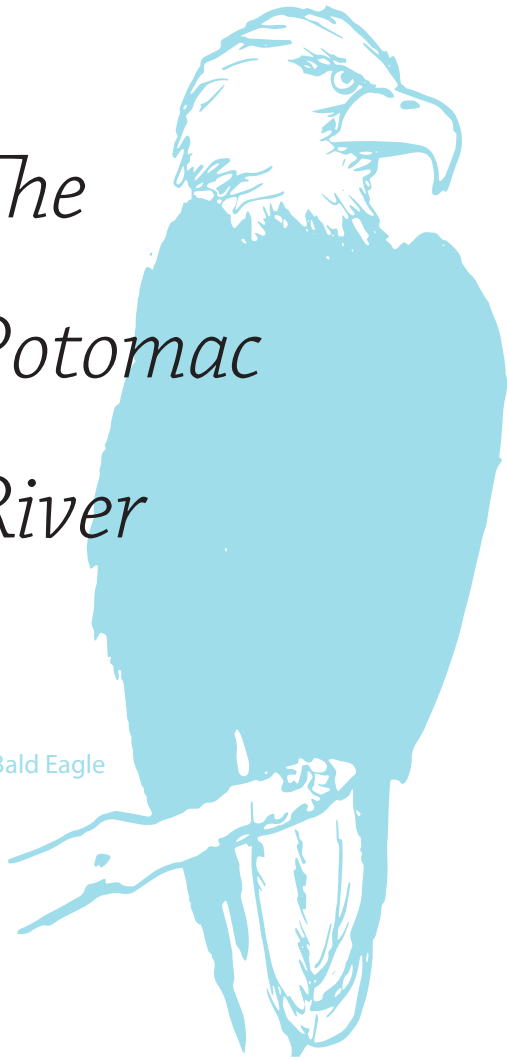
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Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Potomac River

Bald Eagle



**T**HE POTOMAC RIVER is a river that flows through Washington, D.C. It is one of the largest rivers on the East coast of the United States. It is a well-known river in this country because Washington, D.C. is situated upon its shores. It connects to other East coast rivers like the Shenandoah and the Anacostia.

The Potomac begins at Fairfax Stone, West Virginia. It meanders past Harper's Ferry, Alexandria, and Arlington before it reaches Washington, D.C., where it empties into the Chesapeake Bay. The area around its mouth is very populated, with over 5 million people living near it. Though it's well-known, it's not very long: it only runs for about 383 miles.

The Potomac is an important river because it provides the D.C. area with drinking water. It forms some of the border between Maryland and D.C. It is sometimes called "The Nation's River" because of its role in historical events: George Washington was born near it and spent most of his life around it, and all of D.C. is situated near it. Fittingly, bald eagle habitats can be found along its shores.

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Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Ohio River



Fanshell Mussel

**T**HE OHIO RIVER is the largest tributary of the Mississippi by volume, meaning it contains more water than any of the Mississippi's other tributaries. The Ohio runs from Pittsburgh to Cairo, Illinois, and feeds other important Rust Belt rivers along the way, like the Allegheny, Cumberland, and the Tennessee River. It also passes many major cities, such as Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville.

The Ohio River begins as a tributary of the Allegheny River in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It travels for 981 miles through many major American cities before it ends at the Mississippi River. The area near it became some of the first land outside of the thirteen colonies to be explored, and the river eventually served as the border of the Northwest Territory. The river was also very important to commerce: Farmers could send their crops by boat down the Ohio and on to the Mississippi, where their goods could be easily distributed with the numerous settlements along there. This was much faster and easier than sending goods by wagon.

## FACT FILE

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Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# River Boats

**R**IVER BOATS HAVE BEEN USED by humans for thousands of years. They are any kind of boat designed for the lower water levels and quieter waters of rivers rather than open seas or the ocean.

In the 1800s, there was a boom of steam-powered river boats traveling along the Mississippi and other major rivers. These boats became icons of their time and region and have become an important part of our nation's history.

In the 1800s, the United States was just beginning its expansion to the west. People were moving out to the territories around the Mississippi river, seeking

farmland and opportunity. The steamboats became an essential part of connecting the new cities and towns that were growing along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. The often beautifully designed boats would travel along the river stopping in many small towns, carrying wealthy passengers and all kinds of goods and supplies.

These boats had large furnaces in them where wood was burned to boil water, and the steam from the boiling water was used to drive the large paddle wheel in the back of the boat that carried it along. The two large smokestacks, breathing out steam, could be seen from miles away and were an impressive and exciting sight. The coming of a steamboat was a major event for many people living in small, and sometimes isolated, towns along the rivers.

🔍 Look at the picture below of a river steamboat from the 1800s and use it to help answer the questions on the next page.



# River Boats

## Questions

*When I was a boy, there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman. We had transient ambitions of other sorts, but they were only transient ... now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates. These ambitions faded out, each in its turn; but the ambition to be a steamboatman always remained.*

— Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*

1 On the lower deck, several people are loading wood onto the boat. What do you think this wood is going to be used for?

- A** burning for the steam engine
- B** boat repairs
- C** sold as fire wood to towns along the river

2. What do you think is behind the siding of the boat where its name, *Ben Campbell*, is painted?

- A** the steam engine
- B** rooms for passengers
- C** the paddlewheel

3. Who do you think is the person in the cabin at the very top of the boat?

- A** the boiler engineer
- B** a passenger
- C** the pilot

 After reading the quote above by Mark Twain about his childhood along the Mississippi, why do you think steamboats were so exciting to children at the time?

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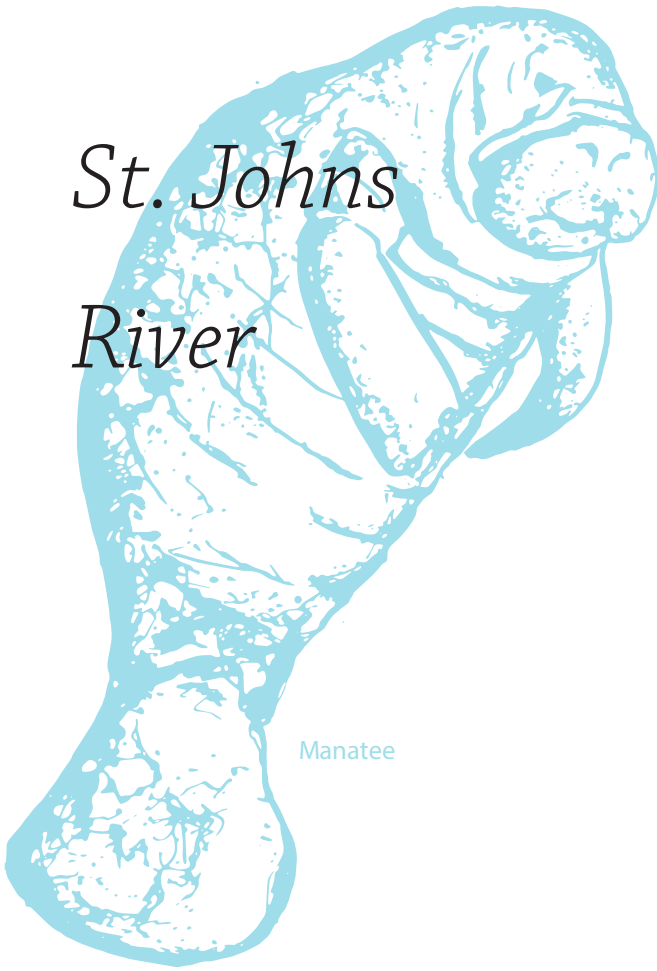
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# St. Johns River



**T**HE ST. JOHNS RIVER IS THE LONGEST river in Florida, and it passes through 12 counties in the state. The source of the river is a large marshy area in Indian River County, Florida. It is most famous for being home to a huge variety of wildlife, from birds to mammals to reptiles and even unusual plants. Manatee populations swim up the St. Johns to reach the warmer waters of Blue Springs during the winter. The St. Johns stretches for 310 miles before meeting its end at the Atlantic Ocean, in a marsh near Vero Beach. The biggest city on its course is Jacksonville, and major tributaries that flow into the St. Johns River include the Wekiva and Econlockhatchee Rivers.

The St. Johns is a blackwater stream. Its water comes from the swamps and marshes that surround it. Tannins from decaying vegetation are what turn the water black.

People have lived near the St. Johns for centuries. Starting in the 1950s, well-preserved Native American animal totems began to be found under the river's bed. Today it is the focus of cleanup and conservation efforts, and residents work to make the river as clean and healthy as possible.

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Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Susquehanna River



**T**HE SUSQUEHANNA RIVER IS A MAJOR river of the Appalachian region of the United States. It is one of the oldest rivers in the world, dating back to the Mesozoic Era.

Roughly 4 million people live along its 444 mile path.

The Susquehanna's journey begins in Otsego Lake in Cooperstown, New York. It winds through the Appalachian region of Pennsylvania before emptying into the Chesapeake Bay. On the way, it passes cities like Cooperstown, Altoona, Lancaster, and Harrisburg. Other rivers like the Juniata and the Lackawanna link to it.

The Susquehanna is the longest river in the United States that isn't used for shipping and transporting goods. Though it has been used in the past to transport coal, the area's main export, it is mostly used today for fun activities like boating, swimming, fishing and camping. The Susquehanna deposits about 22 billion gallons of water into the Chesapeake on a daily basis and is the largest contributor of freshwater into the Bay.

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Cities Along It: \_\_\_\_\_

Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

Chinook Salmon

# The Columbia River



**T**HE COLUMBIA RIVER IS THE MAJOR river of the American Northwest, flowing about 1,243 miles through the U.S. states of Washington and Oregon before emptying into the Pacific Ocean.

The Columbia starts in the Canadian Rockies, where Columbia Lake and the surrounding wetlands come together to start it. It meanders past The Dalles, Vancouver, and Portland, ending near Astoria on the Oregon coast. Many of the Columbia's tributaries are important rivers as well: The Snake River is its largest tributary, and Portland sits at the

confluence of the Willamette and Columbia.

The Columbia is a popular place for fishing. The river is so plentiful with fish that Native tribes in the area settled closely to it, as it was a dependable source of food. It continues to be a major provider of fish like salmon and sturgeon. The Columbia River's flow is so powerful that it makes it a perfect river for hydroelectric power. In the early 20th century, hydroelectric dams were built to harness the power of the river's strong waters. Today, the Columbia is an important shipping route.

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Cities Along It: \_\_\_\_\_

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Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# The Connecticut River



Black Bear

**T**HE CONNECTICUT RIVER is the longest river in New England. It runs from the Fourth Connecticut Lake, near the Canadian border, to the Long Island Sound between Connecticut and New York, covering 410 miles. On its journey to Long Island Sound, it passes Springfield, Massachusetts and Hartford, Connecticut, and feeds other rivers like the Deerfield, the White, and the Ammonosuc.

The area around the Connecticut River is very active farmland, and almost 2 million people live along its path. The river forms the border between

Vermont and New Hampshire, and the area around it is home to several varieties of birds and mammals. Nearby residents like to use the river for recreation like boating and fishing.

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Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Cuyahoga River

River Otter



**T**HE CUYAHOGA RIVER IS LOCATED IN northern Ohio. It connects to Lake Erie and passes the Ohio city of Akron on the way to its mouth on the Cleveland side of the lake. Though it's not very long (it's not quite 100 miles) and doesn't pass very many major cities, 37 tributaries travel many miles into the Cuyahoga, and it has made its way into American history.

The Cuyahoga begins where two rivers meet in Hambden, Ohio. For a long time, the Cuyahoga River was one of the most polluted rivers in the country. As the area around it became more and more populated,

more companies began dumping their waste in the river. In 1969, the river caught fire (not the first time, as the buildup of oil in the river made it catch fire easily), which prompted a magazine article about the river's pollution. After the article came out, people began to look for ways to clean up the river. The Cuyahoga River cleanup is often credited as an event that inspired the modern-day environmental movement.

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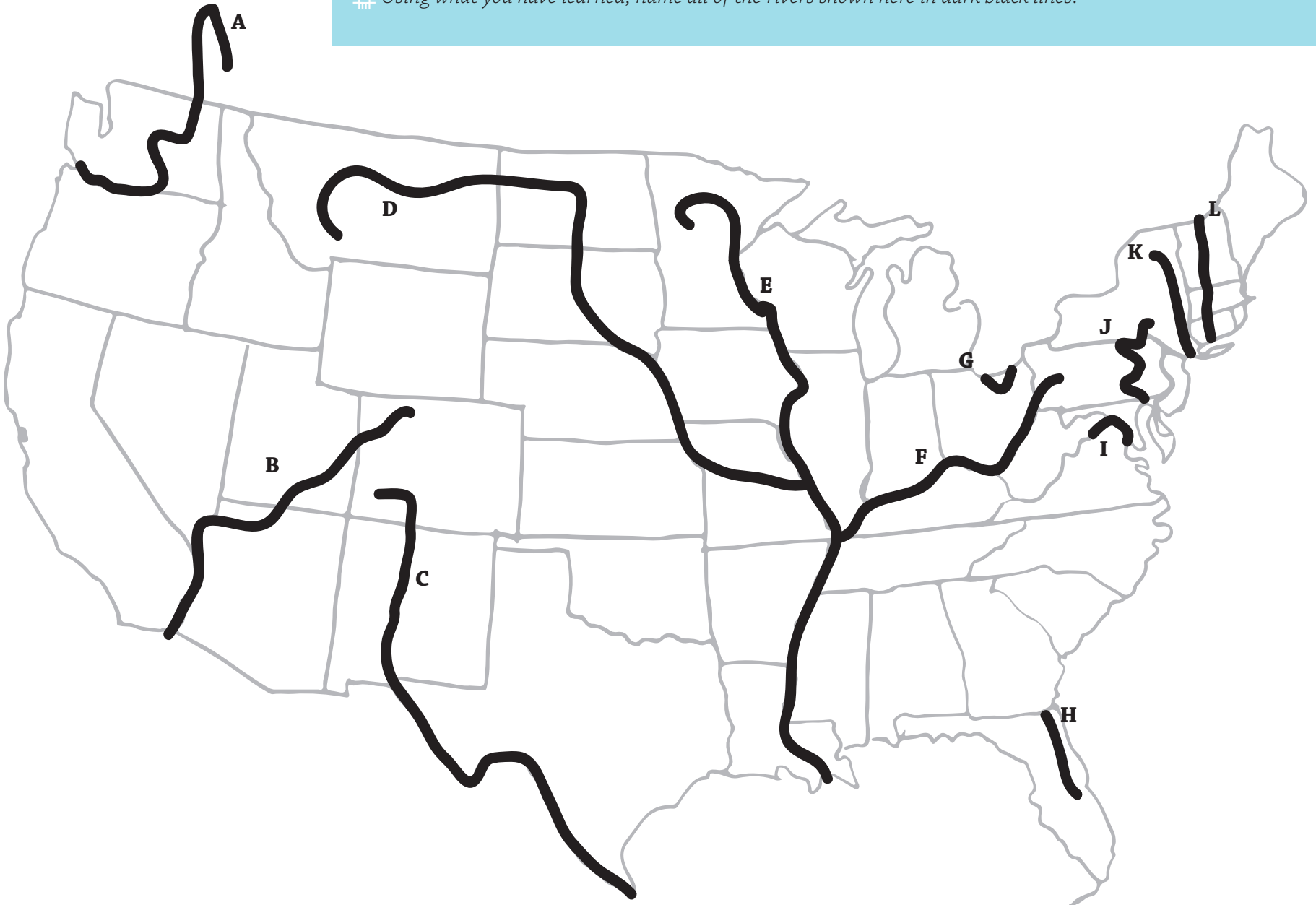
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Tributaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Importance to Communities Near It: \_\_\_\_\_

# Label the Rivers

Using what you have learned, name all of the rivers shown here in dark black lines.





# How are Rivers

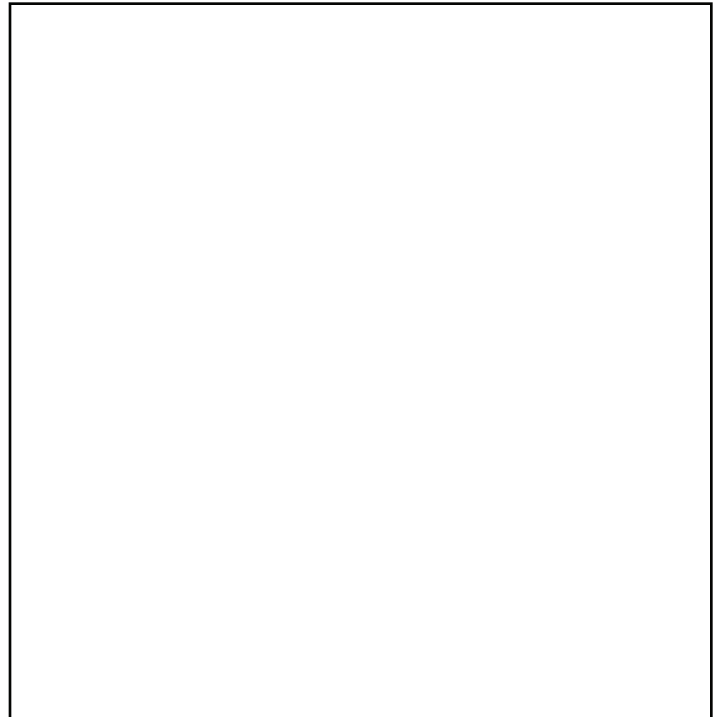
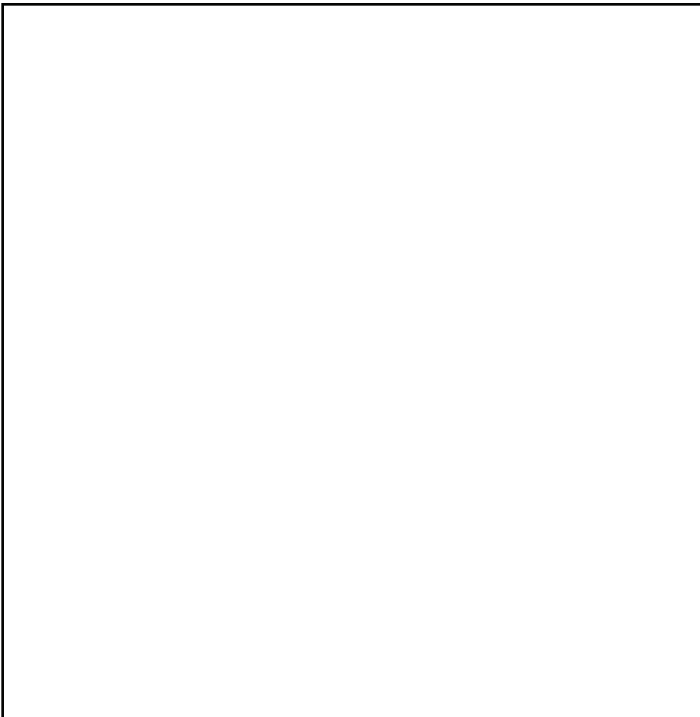
## Formed?

### *a science experiment*

**R**IVERS FORMED OVER THOUSANDS and thousands of years. When snow falls on mountains and hills, it collects in the grooves in the rock. As it melts, it begins to flow down the side of the mountain, carving a path into the rock. It continues to carve its way through the land when it reaches the ground, and moves on until it reaches another body of water.

See for yourself how rivers form with this easy experiment.

- 1 Grab a handful of sand and make a small mound with it. Pack the sand as tightly as you can.
- 2 Place an ice cube on top of your mound. (You might want to do this on a beach day with an ice cube from the cooler!)
- 3 Make a prediction: When the ice cube melts, which way do you think the water will go? Draw a picture of how you think the water's path will look below.
- 4 Wait a few minutes and watch the ice cube melt. Which way did it actually go? Draw a picture of the water's actual path in the box below.
- 5 Try it again, but this time with different amounts of water. What happens when you flood the mound? Use only a tiny trickle?



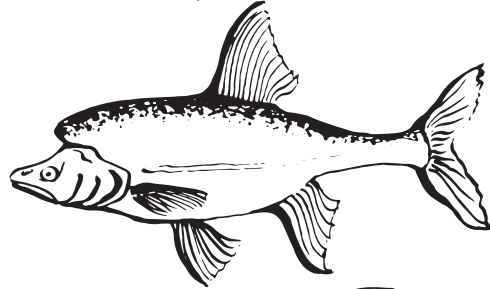
# River Wildlife

Next to each animal, write in one of the rivers that are a part of their habitat. Use the pictures in the text for help.

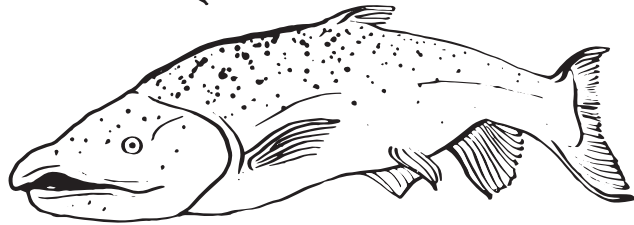
STURGEON



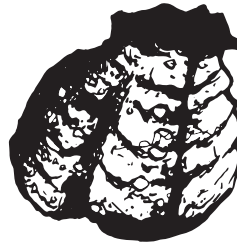
HUMPBACK CHUBFISH



CHINOOK SALMON



FANHELL MUSSEL

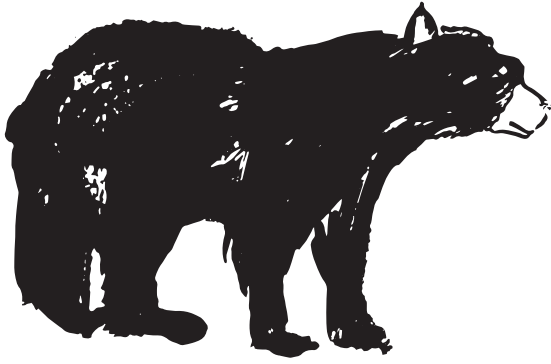


RIVER OTTER



OCELOT

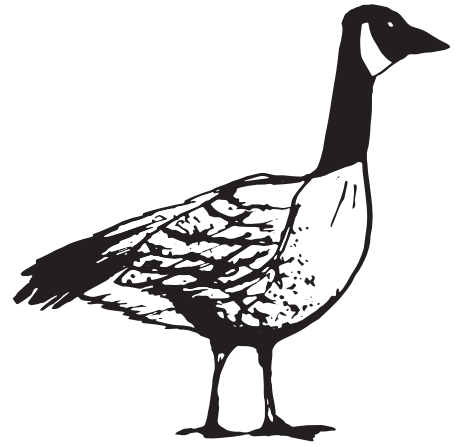




BLACK BEAR



GREAT BLUE HERON



GOOSE

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PELICAN



BALD EAGLE



MANATEE

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*Ten Ways to*

*Keep Rivers*

*Clean and Healthy*



A painting by Asher Brown Durand of the Catskill Mountains with the Hudson River flowing through the valley. In the 1800s the Hudson River was a major inspiration for a group of artists called the Hudson River School. They loved its natural beauty, wildlife, and colors. In the 1900s the Hudson River would become one of the most polluted rivers in the country, but it is now on its way to being restored thanks to the help of many concerned people.

- 1** Clean up after yourself! Throw away your trash and recycling in proper receptacles. Stray litter can make its way into rivers and lakes.
- 2** In the winter, use less salt on your driveway. Salt can flow into storm drains and be poisonous to rivers.
- 3** Dispose of chemicals properly. Ask local businesses to do the same.
- 4** When fishing, don't use tackle that contains lead. Lead can hurt the river's wildlife.
- 5** Save water any way you can. Many communities use water from local rivers.
- 6** Encourage your parents and older siblings to drive less—automotive leakage can run into storm drains.
- 7** Buy non-toxic, biodegradable, and recyclable items as often as you can.
- 8** Leave the area next to streams and lakes alone: if the area has grown wild, there are more plants there to absorb pollutants in the river.
- 9** Organize an official cleanup through a city, state, or national cleanup program.
- 10** Talk to officials! Write to your local representatives and ask for their help in protecting nature.

Great job!

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# Answer Sheets

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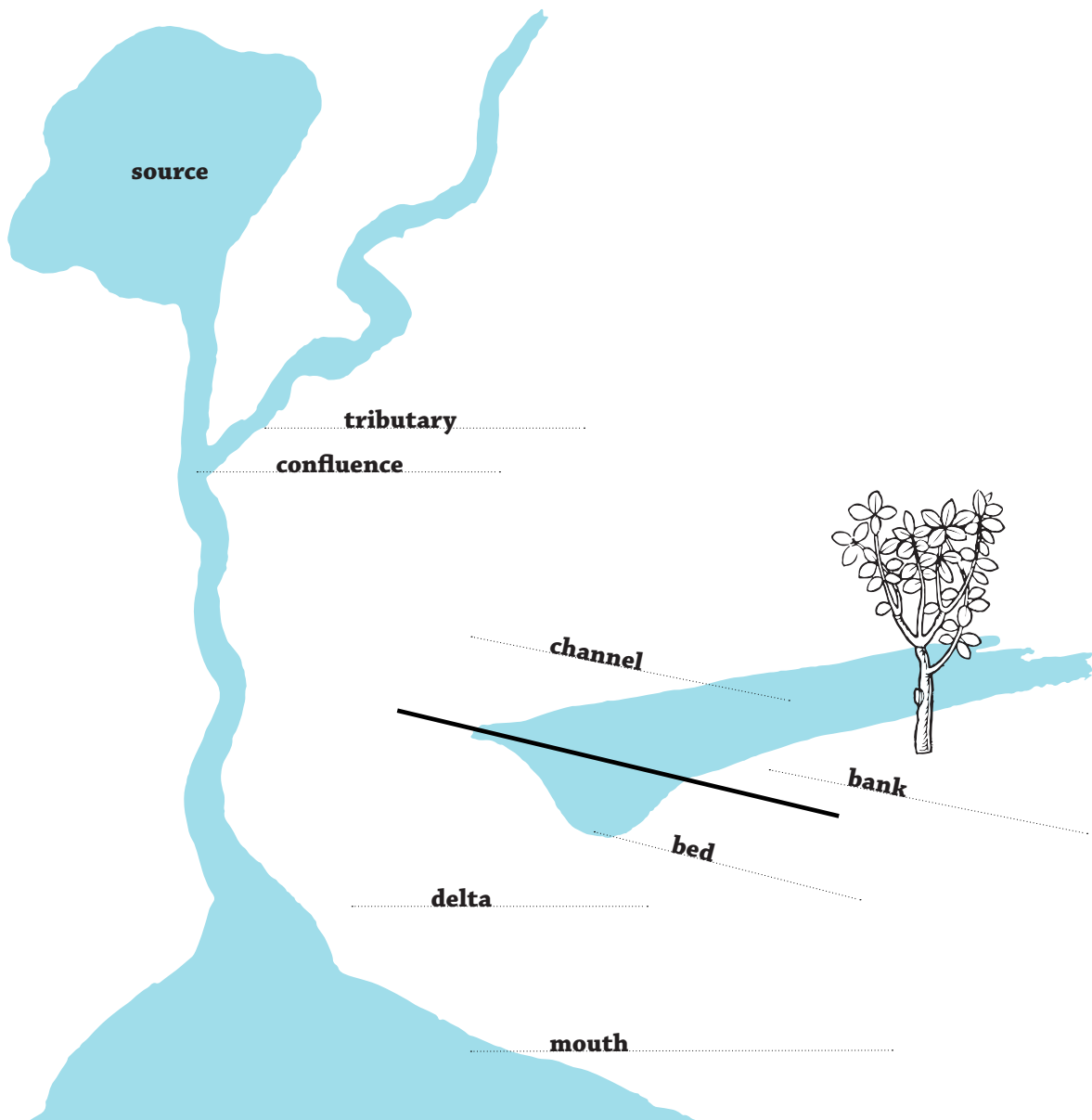
## American Rivers

What is a River?  
The Culture of the Mississippi  
River Boats  
Label the Rivers  
Match the River to Its Meaning  
River Wildlife

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# Answer Sheet

What is  
a River? Answers



# Answer Sheet

## *The Culture of the Mississippi Answers*

1. b, 2. a, 3. a

# Answer Sheet

*River Boats*

*Answers*



1. a, 2. c, 3. c

# Answer Sheet

## *Label the Rivers*

### *Answers*



- a. Columbia, b. Colorado,
- c. Rio Grande, d. Missouri,
- e. Mississippi, f. Ohio,
- g. Cuyahoga, h. St Johns,
- i. Potomac, j. Susquehanna,
- k. Hudson, l. Connecticut

# Answer Sheet

*Match the River*

*Answers*



1. g, 2. c, 3. b, 4. a, 5. d, 6. e, 7. f

bonus: c.

# Answer Sheet

## River Wildlife Answers



### STURGEON

#### *Hudson River*

Sturgeon are a prehistoric kind of fish, dating back to the dinosaurs, with bony plates around their body rather than scales. They were plentiful in the Hudson River until overfishing in the 1900s. However, their populations are now growing.

### HUMPBACK CHUBFISH

#### *Colorado River*

The Humpback Chubfish is native only to the Colorado River. It thrives in the fast moving waters, but damming of the Colorado River has destroyed much of its habitat and it is now an endangered species.

### SALMON

#### *Columbia River*

Salmon are born in rivers, live in the ocean, and then return to the river they were born in, swimming upstream, to spawn. Salmon are an important part of the ecosystem in the Pacific Northwest, but damming of the Columbia River has cut off their return to spawning grounds and reduced their population.

### FANSHELL MUSSEL

#### *Ohio River*

The Fanshell Mussel is one of hundreds of native mollusks in American rivers. Like many other species, it is now endangered.

### RIVER OTTER

#### *Cuyahoga River*

River Otters are a mammal, related to the Weasel, that spend most of their time in the water. They are in many rivers throughout the United States and Canada. They are excellent swimmers and their diet is mostly fish.

### OCELOT

#### *Rio Grande*

The Ocelot is a small wild cat. They are unusual among cat species for their excellent swimming abilities. The Rio Grande watershed is the only place they are found in the United States.

### BLACK BEAR

#### *Connecticut River*

Black Bears are primarily foragers, eating plants and berries, but they are also excellent at fishing. They make their homes in the watersheds of rivers throughout much of the United States

### GREAT BLUE HERON

#### *Mississippi River*

The Great Blue Heron is a large bird found in many American rivers. It wades in shallow waters and marshes, hunting for small fish. There are several species of Heron, and the Great Blue Heron is one of the largest.

### GOOSE

#### *Susquehanna River*

The Goose is a common kind of waterfowl, a bird that spends equal time on land and in water. They are related to ducks and swans.

### PELICAN

#### *Missouri River*

The Pelican is a kind of water bird, famous for the pouch under its beak where it holds fish. Some hunt by scanning the waters from the sky and then diving down; others hunt just on the surface of the water, scooping up fish into their beak.

### BALD EAGLE

#### *Potomac River*

The Bald Eagle is famous as the symbol of the United States, but for many years it was an endangered species. Populations have grown since, but they are still a rare sight.

### MANATEE

#### *St Johns River*

Manatees are large water mammals, found in the warm waters around the Caribbean. They can be as long as 13 feet, and weigh 1,300 pounds. They are primarily plant eaters, spending much of their time grazing sea plants in shallow waters.