

## **Title of Lesson: *Steamboat Transportation in Alabama***

*(Suggested grade level: 10)*

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### **Background Information:**

- Read the text of "[Early History of Steamboats in Alabama](#)" by Mell A. Frazer and print the attached excerpts.
- An informative article about steamboats in Alabama can be found at <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1803>.
- *Rivers of History: Life on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Cahaba, and Alabama*, by Harvey H. Jackson, III, University of Alabama Press, is an excellent resource for the study of steamboats and would be of value in completing the extension.

**Overview of lesson:** This lesson is part of a unit on technological growth during the mid1800s. Students should have already completed study of the "Era of Good Feelings" and the invention of the steam engine. The students will study steamboat transportation in Alabama and write a journal entry about steamboats and their cargo.

### **Content Standards**

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Tenth Grade: Standard 3, p. 71

[National Standards for History, 1996](#)

Standards in History for Grades 5-12 (p. 94)

Era 4, Standard 2 – How the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions.

[National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies](#), (Bulletin 111, 2010)

Standard 7 – Production, Distribution, and Consumption, p. 112

[National Content Standards in Economics](#), 1998

Content Standard 5 – Students will understand that voluntary exchange only occurs when all participating parties expect to gain.

### **Primary Learning Objective(s):**

- The student will understand the time/distance relationship of differing modes of transportation.
- The student will describe the progression of river travel in the United States and Alabama from barges and flatboats to the steamboat.

- The student will explain how the invention of the steam engine and development of the steamboat affected the economies of the United States and Alabama.

**Time allotted:** 50 minutes

**Materials and Equipment:**

- *PowerPoint* presentation: “[Steamboats in Alabama](#)”
- Excerpts from “[Early History of Steamboats in Alabama](#)” by Mell A. Frazer (attached)
- “Steamboat’s a Comin’” writing assignment and rubric (attached)

**Technological Resources:**

- *PowerPoint* (v. '97-2003) – If you have a newer version, [a viewer](#) (free) may be downloaded from the internet.
- Computer
- Digital projector

**Background/Preparation:**

This lesson will be presented as part of discussion of technological growth that takes place during the early to mid 1800s. Students should have already completed studies of the “Era of Good Feelings” during which the invention of the steam engine took place. Students should also know that the invention of the steam engine made Robert Fulton’s steamboat *Clermont* a reality and contributed to the industrialization of northern textile mills.

**Procedures/Activities:** Before starting the lesson, pass out the excerpts from “Early History of Steamboats in Alabama” to five selected students, and pass out the writing assignment to all students. Tell the class, “During the lesson, you will need to take notes on the readings, the *PowerPoint*, and the discussion in order to complete the assignment.”

**Engagement/Motivation Activity:** Show slide one of the *PowerPoint*. Tell the students, “Today we are going to learn how the steamboat affected travel and the economy of Alabama.” Ask the students, “Approximately how long does it take to travel from Mobile to Montgomery today?” After students have offered answers, come to an agreement on the time to travel by car, approximately 2 ½ hours. Tell the students, “In the early 1800s the trip upriver from Mobile took weeks to complete. With the innovation of steamboat, goods could be moved from Mobile to Montgomery in a much shorter time. The advent of the steamboat dramatically changed the lives of the people who lived along the river. Let’s take a look at the evolution of transportation in the 1800s.”

<b>Step 1</b>	Review the time period by showing slides two through five on the <a href="#">PowerPoint, “Steamboats in Alabama.”</a>
<b>Step 2</b>	Show slide six. Tell students, “By the 1820s, Montgomery had become a center of the cotton trade. Cotton would be taken from the Black Belt area of Alabama to the port of Mobile and then shipped to northern textile mills. At that time, it took a keelboat four to six weeks to come upriver from Mobile to Montgomery.” Ask student with Excerpt #1 to read the selection. Allow time for discussion. Show slide seven to introduce the role of the steamboat in Alabama.
<b>Step 3</b>	Show slide eight. Have student read Excerpt #2. Ask the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What was the name of the first steamboat to arrive in Montgomery from</li> </ul>

	<p>Mobile?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “When did the steamboat arrive?”</li> <li>• “How long did the trip take?”</li> <li>• “Why do you think the steamboat had to stop three times along the way?”</li> <li>• “Why was there such ‘profound excitement’ in Montgomery?”</li> <li>• “How fast did the steamboat travel in an hour?”</li> <li>• “What was the immediate result of the arrival of the <i>Harriet</i>?”</li> </ul>
<b>Step 4</b>	<p>Show slide nine. Have student read Excerpt #3. Ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Why was the <i>Tensas</i> considered a ‘wonderful sight?’”</li> <li>• “How long was the trip from Mobile to Selma?”</li> <li>• “What is the difference between a stern-wheeler and a side-wheeler?”</li> <li>• “How was the <i>Tensas</i> guided?”</li> <li>• “How much cotton could she carry?”</li> <li>• “What was the earliest method of alerting dock workers and passengers of the imminent arrival of the steamboat?”</li> <li>• “How did this method change over time?”</li> </ul>
<b>Step 4</b>	<p>Have student read Excerpt #4. Ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “What kinds of goods were brought upriver from Mobile?”</li> <li>• “What was transported back to Mobile on the steamboats?”</li> <li>• “How did the delay of the <i>Cotton Plant</i> distress the well-to-do in Montgomery?”</li> <li>• “What kinds of goods do you think were transported in barrels?”</li> </ul>
<b>Step 5</b>	<p>Show slide ten. Tell the students, “The side-wheeler <i>Magnolia</i> shown here is being loaded at a cotton shoot. The cotton shoot allowed cotton to be loaded from plantations and warehouses located on river bluffs where cotton was stored to protect it from flooding. Farmers would locate warehouses on the bluffs for storing both their and their neighbors’ cotton.”</p>
<b>Step 6</b>	<p>Have student read Excerpt #5 which was quoted from Frederick Law Olmsted’s <i>Seaboard Slave States</i>. Have students describe the loading process in their own words. Remind them that the cotton had been compressed by a cotton press into a bale weighing approximately 500 pounds.</p>
<b>Step 7</b>	<p>Show slides eleven through thirteen. Allow time for discussion.</p>

#### Assessment Strategies:

- Have students complete the writing assignment described on the attached “Steamboat’s a Comin’” writing assignment and rubric sheet.

#### Extension:

- Have students research and compare the accommodations of passengers on early steamboats and later steamboats.

**Remediation:**

- Copies of the *PowerPoint* handout can be provided to the student prior to the presentation.
- Student can be given a starting sentence for the writing assignment.

**Accommodation:**

- Require fewer paragraphs for the writing assignment.
- Grade less strictly on grammar and spelling.

**Modification:**

- Have student complete a four-frame picture story in lieu of the writing assignment.

## Excerpts from "Early History of Steamboats in Alabama"

### Excerpt #1

The earliest commerce on the rivers of Alabama was on flat-boats and barges, or keel-boats. These loaded with up-country products floated down the river; then they changed cargoes and were slowly and tediously poled back by hand whence they came; or they were sold for lumber and their owners returned home by land. In time this commerce increased until it gave employment to many rough and hardy men—rude, uneducated, yet brave, honest, trustworthy, and faithful to duties and promises, and often picturesquely magnanimous.

For several years after the appearance of steamboats, these men continued to run their flat-boats down stream, the steamboats doing all of the up-stream business. The flat-boatmen would sell their boats for anything they could get for them and return home as deck passengers on the steamers.

Excerpt #2

Until October, 1821, no steamboat had come up as high as Montgomery on the Alabama River. Grave doubts had existed as to the practicability of steaming up so far in consequence of sand bars, islands, and narrow channels. Hence, prior to this time, all navigation was still confined to barges and pole-boats, which, of course, was a slow and tedious process. The feasibility of steam navigation had been fully established, however, and it was only reserved for the steamboat "Harriet," commanded by Captain Morril, to solve the question of its practicability as far as Montgomery. This steamboat arrived at Montgomery on the afternoon of October 22, 1821. She had been ten days on the trip from Mobile, including three lost at Claiborne, Cahaba, and Selma. The presence of this boat caused profound excitement in Montgomery. The entire population, men and women, old and young, turned out to see the won-

der. On the next afternoon the "Harriet" took a party of ladies and gentlemen up the river about seven miles, making nearly six miles per hour against the current. As a result of this trip a company was at once formed in Montgomery to put on a line of steamers to ply between Mobile, Montgomery, and Blakeley.<sup>9</sup>

Excerpt #3

Hardy, in his history of Selma, also mentions an early boat. This boat was named the "Tensas," and was under the command of Captain Roman. She landed at the Selma ferry on Aug. 5, 1822, and was considered a wonderful sight. Many people who had never seen a steamboat before, stood upon a high bluff, and looked down at it with a strange mingling of fear and astonishment. But few could be persuaded to go aboard and examine the machinery of the "belching craft." It had been 23 days from Mobile to Selma; and when it landed, Captain Roman "jumped up and cracked his heels together and offered to bet that he would make the trip in less than 14 days." It is interesting to note that this early boat was a stern-wheeler, for nearly all the boats prior to 1861, with a few exceptions, were side-wheel boats. Now most of the boats have stern wheels. The pilot stood on the deck of the "Tensas" and guided her with a long lever instead of a wheel. She was covered like a shed and could carry about 200 bales of cotton.<sup>10</sup>

The steamboats at this early period had no whistles, possibly because they had no steam to spare. They had instead heavily charged guns,<sup>11</sup> which were fired when they approached a landing, that the freight and passengers might be ready. In time the gun gave place to the whistle, and some of the later and larger boats even had a sort of steam organ, commonly called a calliope, which was played on approaching or leaving the landing.<sup>12</sup>

Excerpt #4

The people of Montgomery began at once to rely upon the steamboats from Mobile for dry-goods, groceries, hardware, and stationery. On the down trips the boats transported cotton in exchange. In December, 1822, for example, the steamer "Cotton Plant" was delayed, and the people of Montgomery grew uneasy. Ladies wanted new gowns; and gentlemen new coats. A ball came near being postponed, because the town had no loaf sugar or flour. "Captains of steamboats ought always to think of these things, and remember there is a tide in the affairs of boats, which taken at the flood leads on to wherever they are bound; omitted, they are liable to sand bars and consequent vexation."<sup>20</sup>

Another steamboat of prominence at this time was the "Arkansas." She was a handsome boat in appearance, and was able to make the trip from Mobile to Cahaba in six days. She was a fine boat, carrying from 400 to 600 barrels.<sup>21</sup> Another boat soon followed. On the 1st of January, 1824, the "Columbus" arrived at Montgomery from Mobile in seven days. She had a large cargo, 1800 barrels, and discharged goods at every town and landing between Blakeley and Montgomery. She ran very little at night. On her arrival she fired a salute which was answered from the shore. She returned to Mobile with 300 bales of cotton, the rest of the cargo being made up at Selma and other places.

Excerpt # 5

He also describes the method of loading cotton when the landing is near a high bluff, as at Claiborne. "The boat came to the shore at the end of a plank slideway, down which cotton was sent to it from a warehouse at the top. There was something truly Western in the direct, reckless way in which the boat was loaded. A strong gang plank being placed at right angles to the slideway, a bale of cotton was let slide from the top, and, coming down with fearful velocity, on striking the gang plank it would rebound up and out on the boat against a barricade of bales previously arranged to receive it. The moment it struck this barricade, it would be dashed at by two or three men and jerked out of the way, and others would roll it to its place for the voyage, on the tiers aft. The mate standing near the bottom of the slide, as soon as the men had removed one bale to what he thought a safe distance, would shout to those aloft and down would come another. Not unfrequently a bale would not strike fairly on its end, and would bound off diagonally overboard; or would be thrown up with such force as to go over the barricade, breaking stanchions and railings, and scattering the passengers on the berth deck. Negro hands were sent to the top of the bank to roll the bales to the slide, and Irishmen were kept below to remove and store them."<sup>71</sup>

## Steamboat's a Comin' Writing Assignment and Rubric

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Directions:

Choose one of the following writing prompts:

- Imagine you are living in Montgomery. You are very excited to see a steamboat coming up the Alabama River for the first time. Write a journal entry of at least three paragraphs in which you describe seeing the steamboat and the workers unloading its cargo. Describe the items being unloaded for Montgomery and loaded for Mobile. Use information discussed in the *PowerPoint* presentation and in the readings.
- Imagine you are observing the loading of cotton from a high bluff on the Alabama River onto the *Magnolia*. Write a journal entry of at least three paragraphs in which you describe seeing the steamboat and the workers on the bluff and on the steamboat loading the cotton. Use information discussed in the *PowerPoint* presentation and in the readings.

### Rubric:

CATEGORY	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point	Score
<b>Focus on Topic</b>	There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main idea stands out and is supported by detailed information.	Main idea is clear but the supporting information is general.	Main idea is somewhat clear but there is a need for more supporting information.	The main idea is not clear. There is a seemingly random collection of information.	
<b>Accuracy of Facts</b>	There are two to three accurate and supportive facts in each paragraph.	There are two to three supportive facts in each paragraph but not all are accurate.	Not all facts are accurate or supportive.	No facts are reported or most are inaccurately reported.	
<b>Sequencing</b>	Details are placed in a logical order and hold the attention of the reader.	Details are placed in a logical order but are not very interesting.	Some details are not in a logical or expected order thus distracting the reader.	Many details are not in a logical or expected order.	
<b>Grammar &amp; Spelling</b>	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling.	
<b>Conclusion</b>	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader with a better understanding of steamboats in Alabama.	There is a predictable conclusion that gives the reader some understanding of steamboats in Alabama.	There is a conclusion, but it does not summarize the content of the writing assignment.	There is no clear conclusion.	

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_