

River Murray Website Teachers' Kit



Secondary School



Notes for teachers

The State Library of South Australia has produced a website on the River Murray based on its extensive collection of pictorial, archival and published material relating to the river and its importance to the history of South Australia.

Teachers will find the website a valuable resource for historical and contemporary material relating to the river and its importance to the economic, social and political development of our state.

Studies of Society and Environment can include a unit on the Murray, especially in regard to how it has shaped the history and demography of South Australia. The learning activities in this kit will satisfy the learning outcomes for standards 2–5 of all the Society and Environment strands in the SACSA framework.

Secondary students

Learning Activities for secondary students

European discovery of the Murray

The explorer Captain Charles Sturt was the first European to find and travel the length of the river from the Murrumbidgee to the sea. He called it the Murray after the colonial secretary of New South Wales, Sir George Murray.

- Using the *Australian Encyclopaedia* in your school or public library, write a brief biography of Captain Charles Sturt.
- The Murray was also discovered by explorers in New South Wales and was first known by another name. What was that name?

How have we used the Murray?

Groups of Aborigines settled around the banks of the River and developed their culture in connection with it. They fished for food, wove baskets from the reeds that grew along the water's edge, made canoes from the bark of trees, and shared stories of the Dreaming.

According to the Ngarrindjeri people who live around the Coorong area, Ngurunderi, ancestor of the Coorong people created the River and its surrounds. Ngurunderi was chasing Ponde, a large Murray cod. He threw his spear at it many times, but each time the cod escaped and the ensuing chase formed the River.

- Read some Dreaming stories from the Ngarrindjeri people. Ask at your school library or your local public library. Share the stories with the rest of your class.
- Discuss why the River Murray is so important to the present day Ngarrindjeri people.

The Murray has been a rich source of food for both indigenous people and European settlers. Aborigines fished for cod, bream, and catfish as well as shellfish and crustaceans. Wildlife along the banks of the Murray were hunted – kangaroo, possum, water fowl, eggs, and snakes. Water reeds, quandongs, berries etc were also gathered from the water's edge.

When the European settlers arrived they introduced new species of fish and bird life into the Murray's ecosystem.

- What fish and animals have been introduced by Europeans?
- What sort of problems does their introduction create?
- Why do you think they were introduced?

Towns along the Murray

Europeans settled along the Murray where the river provided a source of fresh water for themselves, their stock and their food crops.

- In an atlas of South Australia look for towns along the edge of the River Murray. Write down as many as you can see.
- Look up the towns you have found in the *Australian Encyclopaedia* and answer the following:
 1. When was the town settled?
 2. What food products are produced there?
 3. What is the population of each town?

The State Library has photographs of many South Australian towns. Find them on the South Australiana Database on the State Library's Website www.slsa.sa.gov.au

River Murray towns are featured under 'European settlement' on the River Murray Website www.slsa.sa.gov.au/murray

Boating on the Murray

During the early days of the colony, the Murray was used for a variety of activities. Paddle-steamers cruised up and down the river carrying pleasure-seekers and tourists, passengers from New South Wales and Victoria, cargoes of dried fruit, wheat, wool and timber for railway construction, missionaries bound for out of the way townships, seasonal labourers, and supplies of food and wares for the townships along the river. Before the railways were completed, paddle-steamers were the main source of transportation between the colonies.

However, the paddle-steamer trade did not always run smoothly. In summer and autumn the water level in the river dropped, often making navigation impossible and stranding the boats.

Snags, or obstacles in the river could damage the boats.

Traders who wanted to avoid paying import taxes for goods crossing the border between Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia would smuggle their wares on board, which were sometimes intercepted by customs. With the railway lines complete, river travel became less popular and ultimately no longer profitable because the railways were more efficient and direct.

From what you have learned about river boats on the Murray, write a story or a poem about life on a paddle-steamer.

- Design a travel brochure outlining a holiday on a river boat. Include details of the paddle-steamer, how many days you will be on the river, what towns you will visit, what activities you will do and what food you will eat.
- Some have compared the Murray with the Mississippi river in the United States of America. Research both rivers and see how they compare.
 1. What are the similarities?
 2. What are the differences?

Managing the Murray: weirs and locks

The water level in the Murray fluctuated dramatically over the years. Sometimes record breaking rains would flood the river and other years, little or no rain fell at all. Unpredictable water levels made paddle-steamer travel dangerous and unprofitable. Settlements along the river suffered in time of drought when water levels were insufficient to sustain irrigation. Crops failed and settlements were abandoned. Something needed to be done to manage the Murray's water levels and sustain the river's industries, so locks and weirs were built to regulate the water levels.

River Murray Water Levels 1896 – 1905

Look at the table below which documents the water levels in the River Murray over a 19 year period. During these times, measurements were made in 'feet'.

Month /year	Water level								
Jan 1886	5 feet	March 1890	8 feet	April 1894	8 feet	June 1898	5 feet	April 1902	0 feet
June 1886	2 feet	Sept 1890	27 feet	Sept 1894	25 feet	Oct 1898	12 feet	Sept 1902	3 feet
March 1887	10 feet	June 1891	13 feet	April 1895	4 feet	Mar 1899	4 feet	Mar 1903	0 feet
Oct 1887	20 feet	Nov 1891	22 feet	Nov 1895	13 feet	Oct 1899	12 feet	Sept 1903	12 feet
June 1888	6 feet	May 1892	4 feet	April 1896	5 feet	Mar 1900	1 foot	April 1904	15 feet
Nov 1888	12 feet	Nov 1892	17feet	Nov 1896	10 feet	Oct 1900	16 feet	Sept 1904	8 feet
Apr 1889	12 feet	April 1893	9 feet	June 1897	4 feet	Mar 1901	0 feet	April 1905	2 feet
Oct 1889	12 feet	Oct 1893	22 feet	Oct 1897	12 feet	Oct 1901	12 feet	Sept 1905	12 feet

- Draw a bar graph to show the fluctuations
- What were the months with the highest water level?
- What were the months with the least?
- What does this tell us about South Australia's rainfall pattern?
- How did the fluctuations in rainfall affect the riverboat business and the settlements along the river?

Use a dictionary or an encyclopaedia to answer the following questions:

- What is a lock?
- What is a weir?
- How do they control the water level in the river?
- In which towns are the locks located in South Australia?
- Illustrate your understanding of how locks and weirs work.
- What disadvantages were caused by building locks and weirs?

The ups and downs of life on the River Murray: snakes and ladders game

You will need a dice, some counters and two or more players.
Throw the dice and move the number of spaces across the board.

If you land on a ladder you get a 'leg up' to the next level. If you land on a snake you have to go all the way down the snake's tail and start again.

When you have finished playing, answer the following questions.

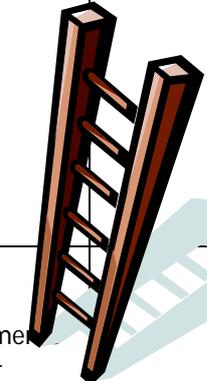
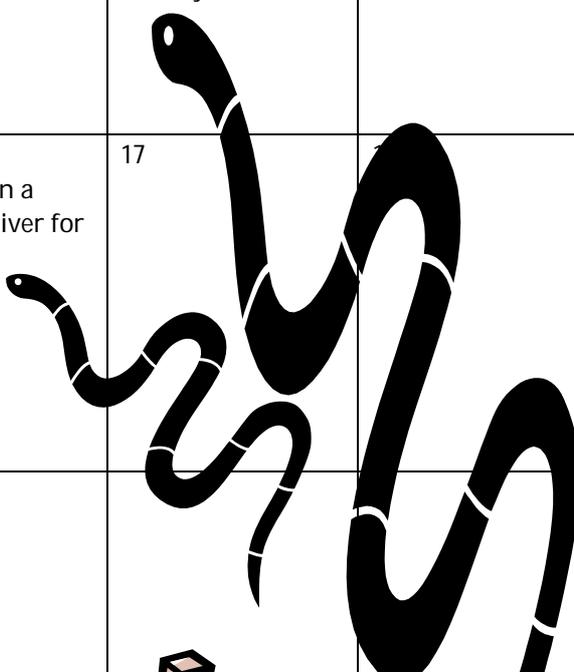
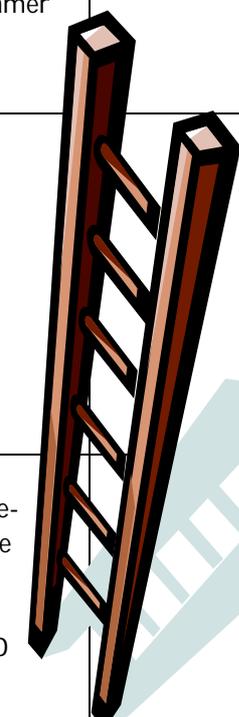
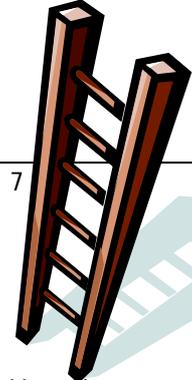
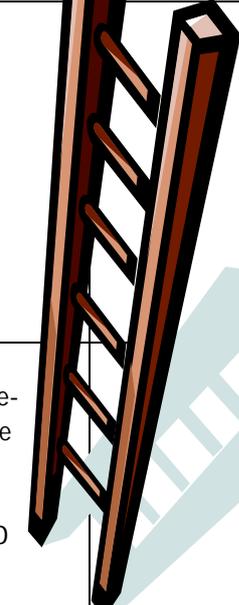
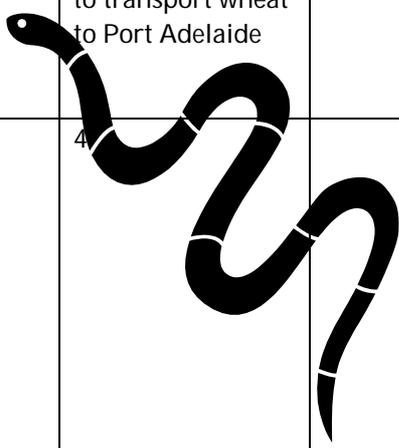
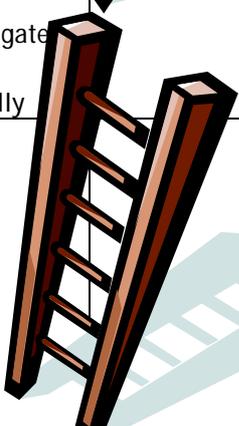
List the factors that kept the riverboat owners and operators in business.

1. -----
2. -----
3. -----
4. -----
5. -----

- List the factors that contributed to their failure.

1. -----
2. -----
3. -----

- What do you think was the biggest factor in the failure of the river boats ?

<p>FINISH</p>	<p>24 Rail road tracks completed and the river boats lose business to the railways</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>22</p>	<p>21</p> 
<p>16 Boat stuck on a snag in the river for two days</p>	<p>17</p> 	<p>20</p>	<p>19 New settlements on the river means more trade for your paddle-steamer business</p>	
<p>15</p>		<p>8</p>	<p>12</p>	
<p>6 Low rainfall has made the river too shallow to proceed so you have to turn back</p>	<p>7</p> <p>You win a contract to transport wheat to Port Adelaide</p> 	<p>23</p>	<p>9 Your paddle-steamer, the <i>Mary Ann</i> wins the prize of 300 pounds for being the first to navigate the Murray commercially</p>	
<p>5</p>	<p>4</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>2 Holiday season means more tourists on the river</p>	<p>START</p> 