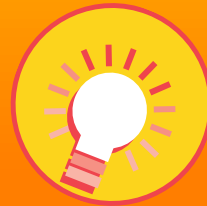


Comprehension Workbook 10

Levee

Life on the river bank



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

Comprehension Workbook 10

Levee

Life on the river bank

Steamboats



The levee



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

River

Matches the requirements of the Literacy Strategy and designed to integrate with the study of river. (This material is independent of any specific text book and can be used alongside any publisher's books including our River Book.)

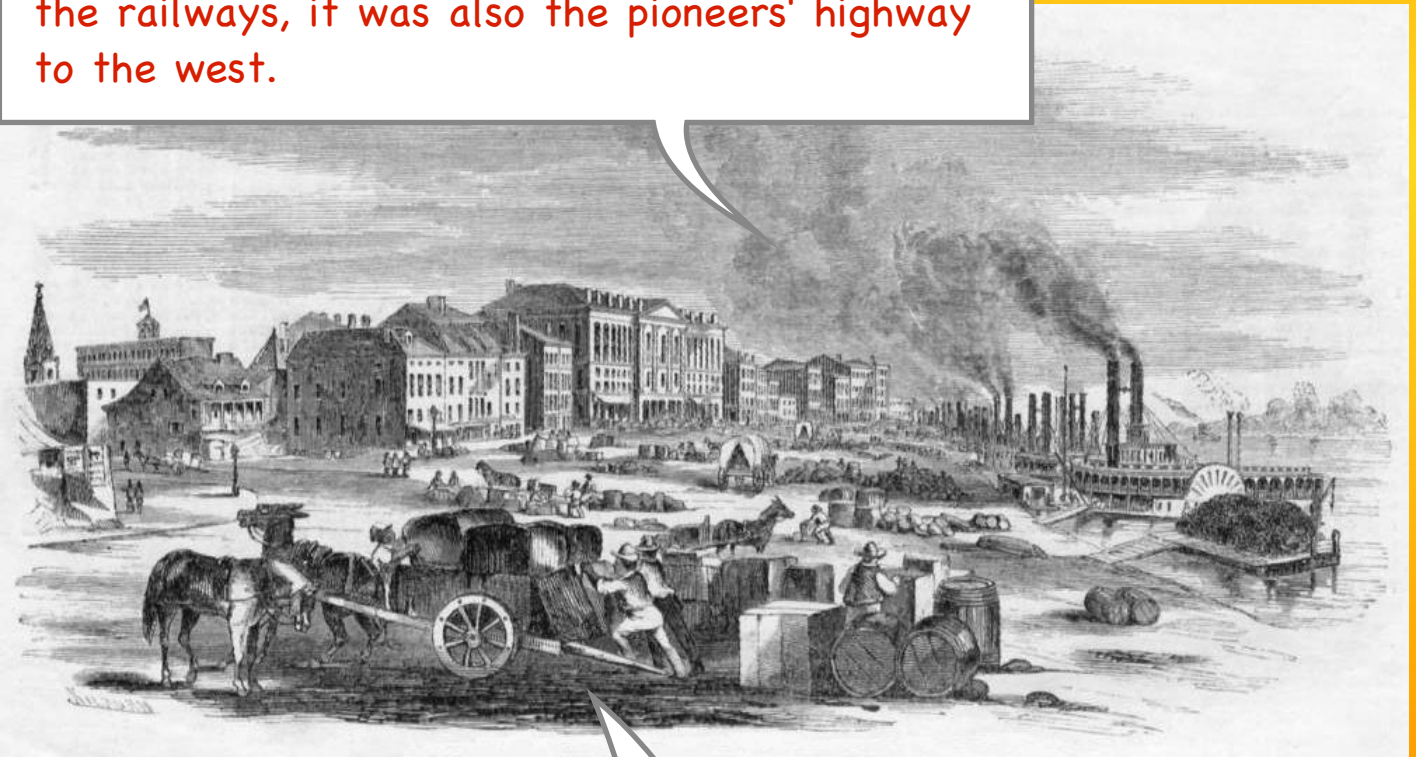
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Life on the levee

The Mississippi is one of the world's largest rivers. In the 19th century, in the time before the railways, it was also the pioneers' highway to the west.



The banks of the Mississippi are tall and broad, rather like wide earthen walls. They are called levees. They are made by the river when it floods, but for the rest of the time, they hold the water in. The levees are used as places to build houses and shores to beach riverboats.

St. Louis was the farthest upriver that large steamboats could go during the 19th century. So goods coming upriver from New Orleans on the coast had to be off-loaded at St. Louis.

The steamboats brought in and took away so much cargo that there were jobs galore. It became a boom town.

This was also the city from which most pioneers set out westwards in the 1840s. They haggled with the merchants over the prices of oxen, wagons and food for the journey. Then they set off west in search of land to farm.

In these times it was common to see more than 150 steamboats lined up along the St. Louis levee. By the 1850s, St. Louis had become the second-largest port in the United States.

The steamboats beached gently against the levee mud. Then a ramp, or gangplank, was lowered from the deck, and the cargo was brought off on the shoulders of men, or using wheelbarrows.

Carts drawn by horses and donkeys were waiting, and the goods were pushed, shoved, pulled or rolled into the carts. Then it was off to the merchants who had bought the goods for selling to the next group of pioneers.



Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'pioneer'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'pioneer' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'pioneer'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'pioneer'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'pioneer' means.



Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: haggled	bargained

3

Summarising

(the gist of the story)



To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence.
e.g. "This story tells us..."

3 Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

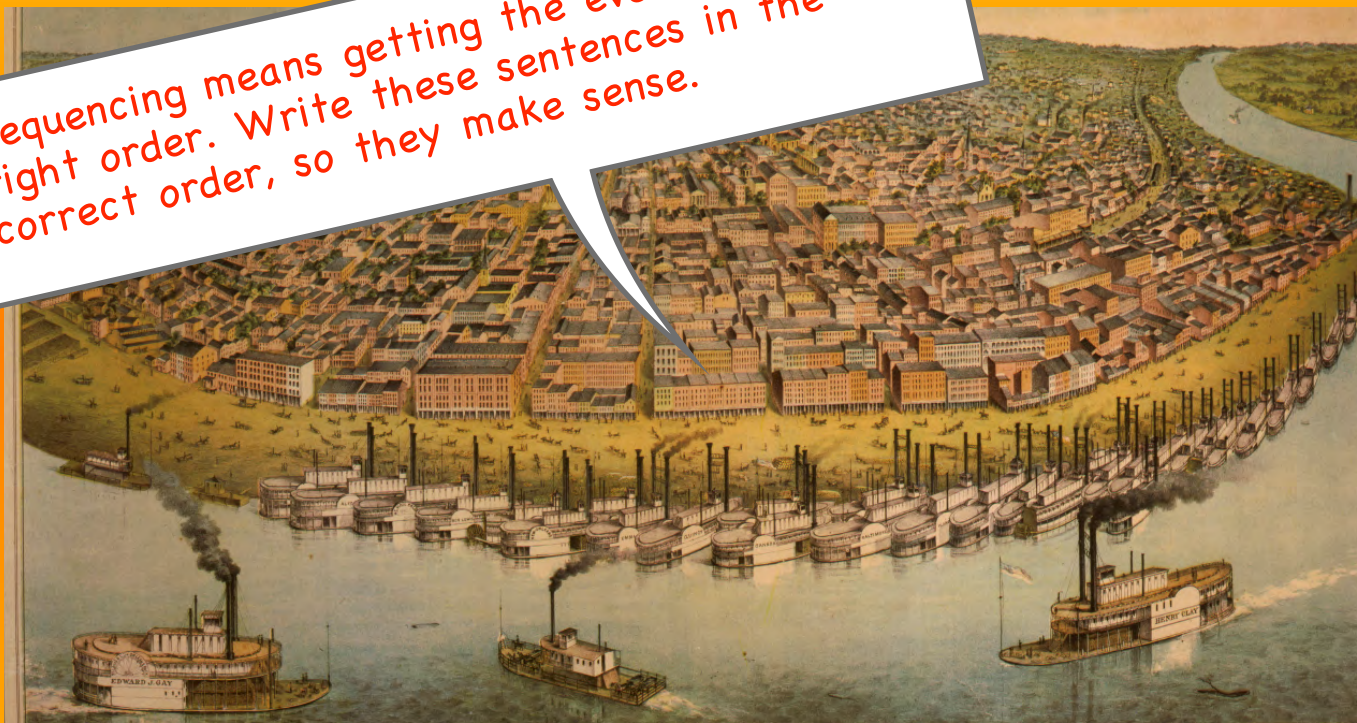
**Finally,
can you rewrite your
summary to make it better?**

1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.
2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.
3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.
4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?

**There is
nothing wrong
with rewriting; even
the best authors
rewrite their
work.**

123 4 Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.



By the 1850s, St Louis had become the second-largest port in the United States.

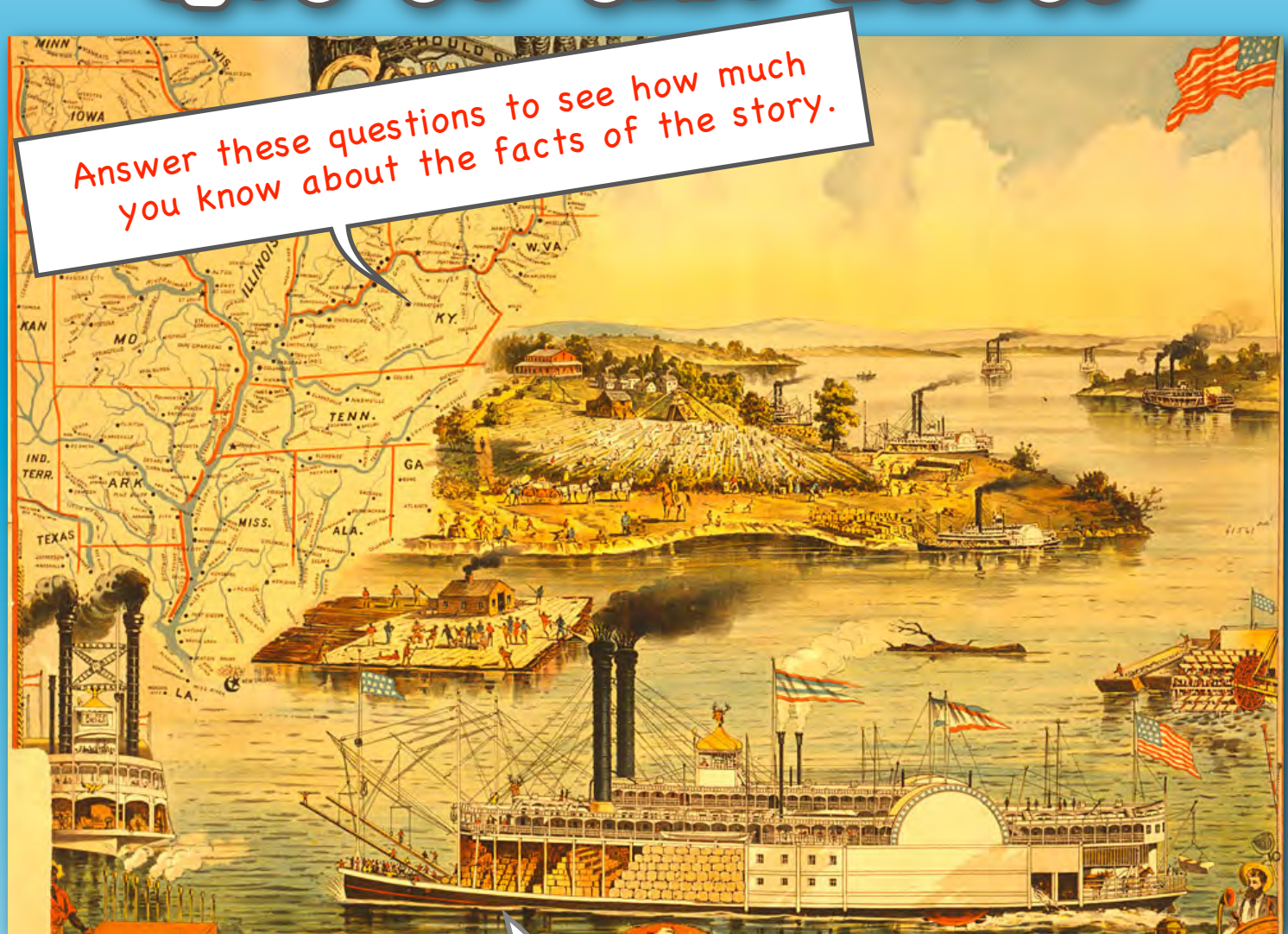
St. Louis was the farthest upriver that the largest steamboats could go.

It became a boom town.

Most pioneers set out westwards from St. Louis in the 1840s



Get to the facts



Which is the correct answer?

1. Where was St. Louis? (a) near the river's source; (b) as far upriver as boats could go (c) by the river mouth.
2. Which large group of people left St. Louis in the 1840s? (a) native Americans (b) soldiers (c) pioneers.
3. How were steamboats unloaded? (a) by crane (b) by the pioneers (c) by wheelbarrows.
4. Where were steamboats unloaded? (a) at docks (b) by offloading to small boats while they were still on the river (c) by beaching the boats on the levees.

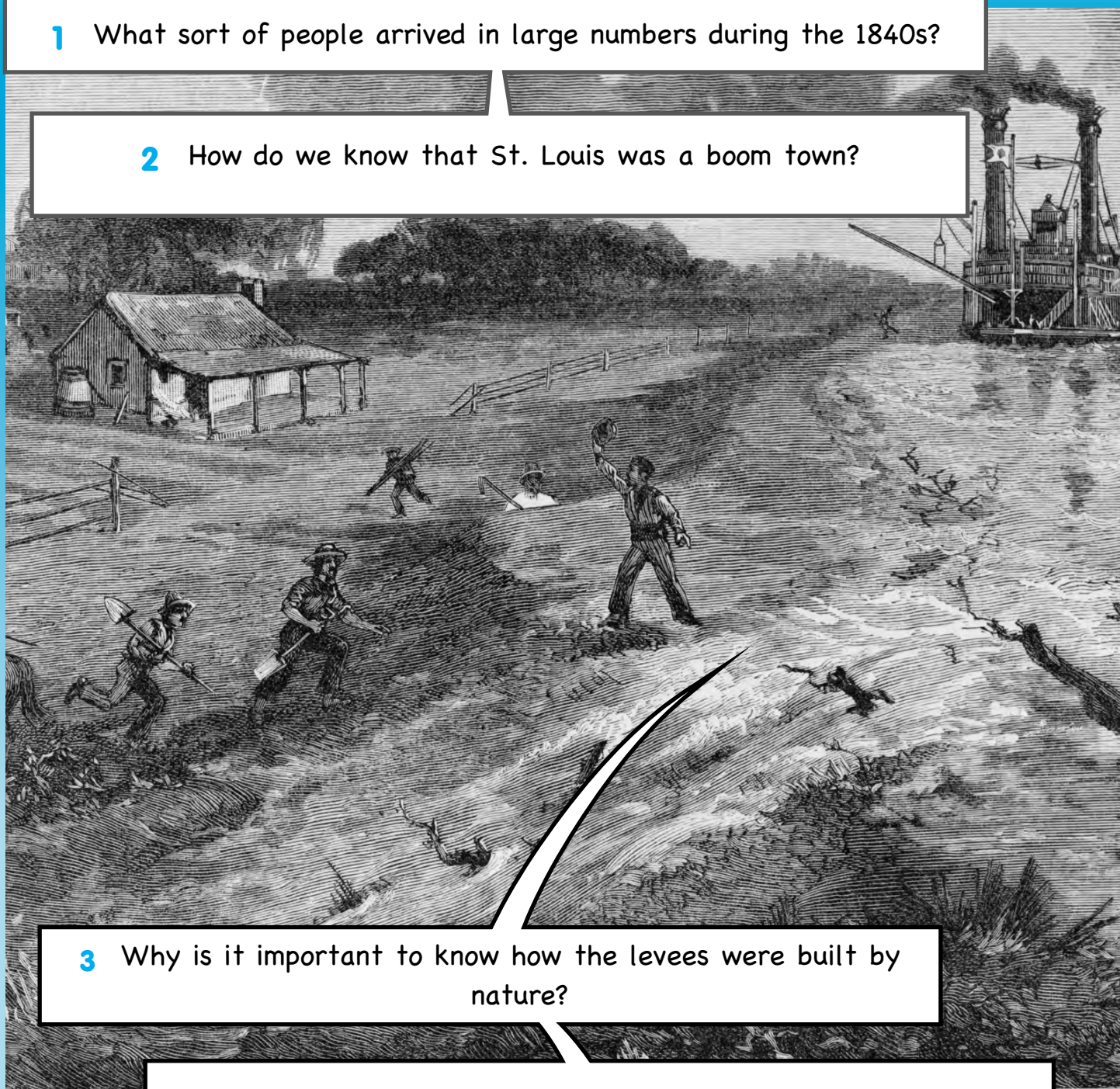


Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.

1 What sort of people arrived in large numbers during the 1840s?

2 How do we know that St. Louis was a boom town?



3 Why is it important to know how the levees were built by nature?

4 What do you think it was like on the shore at St. Louis?



Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

1 Do you think it was likely that the pioneers were treated fairly by the merchants?

2 Imagine you were someone who was looking for a job and you had no skills. What kind of job would you try to get?

3 Do you think the whole business of loading and unloading steamboats was organised or chaotic? Give evidence for your answer.

4 Why do you think people flocked to the city?

5 You are a wealthy American who is on a tour of the new parts of America. You keep a journal of all the events you see and emotions you feel. Write a page of the journal as you come towards St Louis in a first class cabin on the steamboat and spend a day there while the ship is unloaded and reloaded before making its return trip downriver. The pictures in this workbook may help you.



Talking it through

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.

Mississippi floods at New Orleans.



Discussion topic: Breach in the levee

When a levee is breached by a rising river, water spills over on the floodplain. It cannot easily get back to the river even when the river level goes down because the levee is in the way. So everyone has to wait for the water to seep into the soil.

Imagine you were the emergency committee for a local district faced with flooding. You need to make a short radio announcement. Divide into several groups and each write up what you would say. Then each group make their announcement.



Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.



The greatest steamboat race

The most famous steamboat race occurred in June, 1870 from New Orleans to St. Louis between the Natchez VI and the Robert E. Lee. In that month, the Natchez had made a record breaking trip from New Orleans to St. Louis in 3 days, 21 hours and 58 minutes.

Captain John W. Cannon of the Lee decided that the Natchez success could not go unanswered. While waiting for the Natchez to return to New Orleans, he readied the Robert E. Lee for a race by stripping her of excess weight and declining any passengers or cargo.

Captain T. P. Leathers of the Natchez welcomed the challenge, but refused to lighten his burden. Off they set, but what dirty tricks lay ahead? ...

(Now you complete the story...)

Life at the St.Louis levee

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