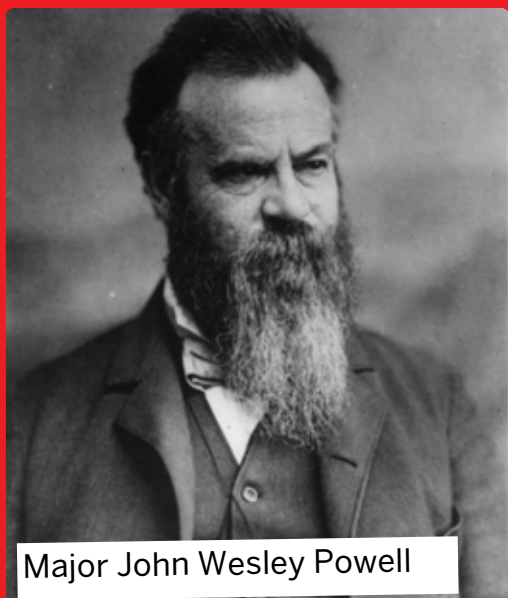


Comprehension Workbook 2

# Colorado

## Exploring the Grand Canyon

Colorado



Major John Wesley Powell

Grand Canyon

Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

# Canyons of the Colorado

J W Powell was one of the first non-native Americans to make a journey through the canyons of the Colorado near the Grand Canyon. His parties used canoes which were smashed many times by the fast-flowing waters. During this adventure the party kept a diary. This is a small part of it.



August 9: "And now the scenery is on a grand scale. The walls of the canyon, 2,500 feet high, are of marble of many beautiful colours, often polished below by the waves..."

Riding [the river water] down a short distance, a beautiful view is presented. The river turns sharply to the east and seems inclosed by a wall set with a million brilliant gems. What can it mean? Every eye is engaged, everyone wonders. On coming nearer we find fountains bursting from the rock high overhead, and the spray in the sunshine forms the gems which bedeck the wall. The rocks below the fountain are covered with mosses and ferns and many beautiful flowering plants...

We pass many side canyons today that are dark, gloomy passages back into the heart of the rocks that form the plateau through which this canyon is cut. It rains again this afternoon. Scarcely do the first drops fall when little rills run down the walls. As the storm comes on, the little rills increase in size, until great streams are formed. ...

Now the waters, loaded with sands, come down in rivers of bright red mud, leaping over the walls in innumerable cascades. It is plain now how these walls are polished in many places...

It is a peculiar feature of these walls that many projections are set out into the river, as if the wall was buttressed for support. The walls themselves are half a mile high, and these buttresses are on a corresponding scale, jutting into the river scores of feet. In the recesses between these projections there are quiet bays, except at the foot of a rapid, where there are dancing eddies or whirlpools...

Above, when the river is at its flood, the waters gorge up, so that the difference between high and low water mark is often 50 or even 70 feet."





# 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 'loaded'.

**b** From that sentence, suggest what 'loaded' means.

**c** Write a new sentence using the word 'loaded'.

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

**e** Draw a small picture showing what you think 'loaded' 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: grand	spectacular

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.



When it rains, water cascades down the canyon walls.

The scenery they started to enter was on a grand scale.

They soon discovered that it was the sunlight catching the droplets coming from waterfalls that made them shine like gemstones.

Powell and his party began their journey down the Colorado River.

As they went on further they saw signs that the gorge fills up to 70 feet deep during floods.

They quickly noticed that the walls shone as though they were full of gemstones.





# Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.



Write a sentence to answer these questions

- (a) How high were the walls of the canyon?
- (b) What plants are on the canyon walls?
- (c) What colour is the mud that forms during floods?
- (d) When rills increase, what do they grow into?
- (e) How much deeper was the flood level than low water level?





# Whys and wherefores

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

1 Why did the party think the walls were covered with sparkling gemstones?

2 What is the result of adding the word 'gloomy' to 'dark' when describing the canyon?

3 What words do they use to describe their sense of wonder at the scenery?

4 What is meant by 'Every eye is engaged.'?



# Opinions matter

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

- 1 Do you think calling water droplets gemstones is a good comparison? Could you think of a better one?
- 2 In one place the writer uses '2,500 ft.', and in another 'half a mile'. These are both about the same height, so does it make any difference to what is being said?
- 3 Write an article of no more than 250 words for the national papers who want to publish a short extract of what happened each day.
- 4 What sort of background do you think the writer had? Was he a poet, a journalist, a geographer or something else? Explain your reasons.
- 5 See if you can write a short poem that describes the wonder of the canyon.

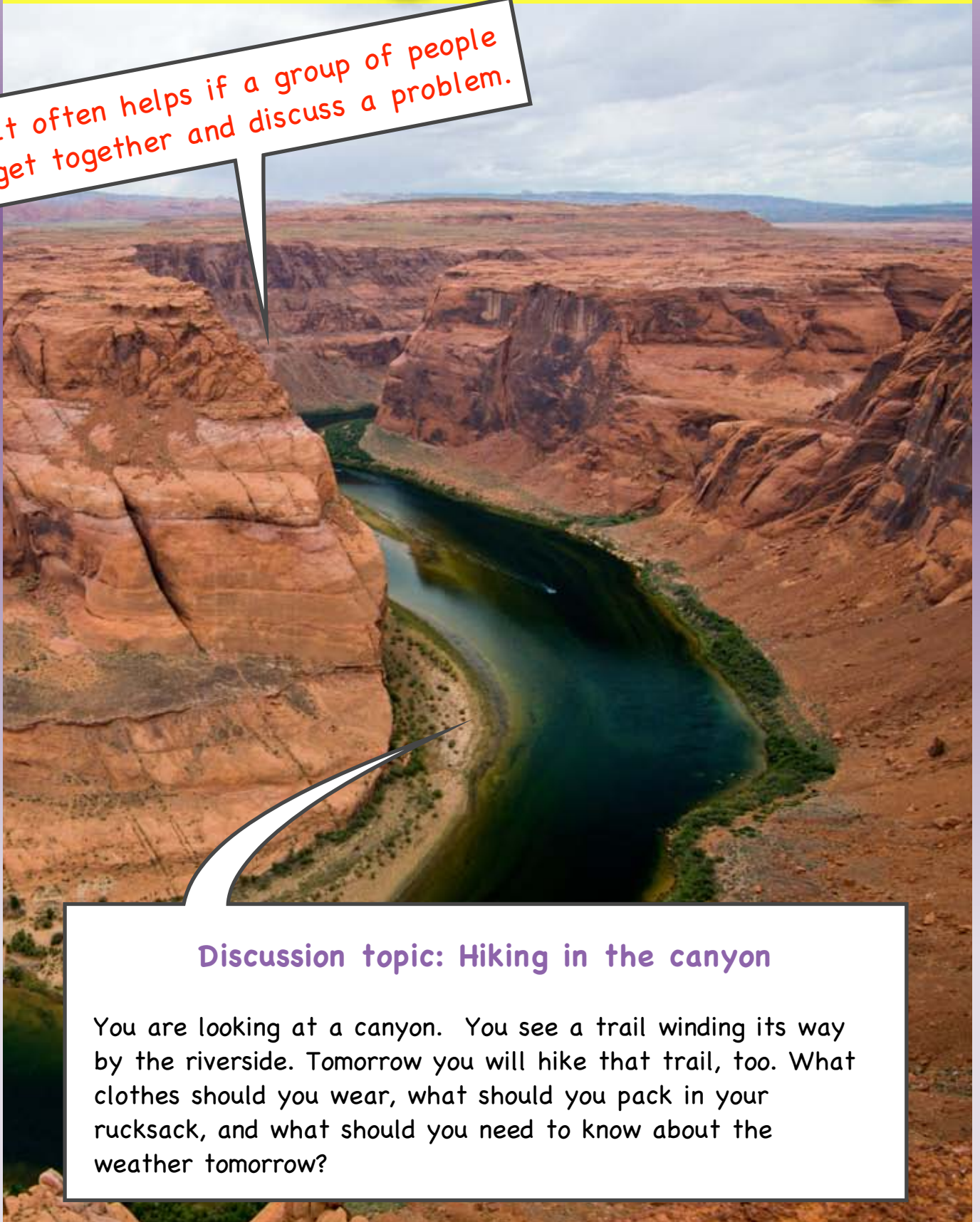






# Talking it through

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



## Discussion topic: Hiking in the canyon

You are looking at a canyon. You see a trail winding its way by the riverside. Tomorrow you will hike that trail, too. What clothes should you wear, what should you pack in your rucksack, and what should you need to know about the weather tomorrow?





# Make a story...

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



## Pioneers of the canyon

It is 1870. You and your party are some of the first tourists to make their way down the steep sides of the canyon by mule. A native American watches you come into his territory...

(Now you complete the story.)

## Canyons of the Colorado, J W Powell, 1895

J W Powell was one of the first non-native Americans to make a journey through the canyons of the Colorado near the Grand Canyon. His parties used canoes which were smashed many times by the fast-flowing waters. During this adventure the party kept a diary. This is a small part of it.

August 9

“And now the scenery is on a grand scale. The walls of the canyon, 2,500 feet high, are of marble of many beautiful colours, often polished below by the waves...

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