

LEVELED BOOK • H

# The Mighty Mississippi

Written by Caryn Swark

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## Table of Contents

A Long Journey . . . . .	4
The Upper River . . . . .	7
The Lower River . . . . .	10
The Mighty Mississippi . . . . .	15
Glossary . . . . .	16





Lake Itasca in Minnesota is the starting point of the Mississippi River.

## **A Long Journey**

Rain falls.

It mixes into the clear waters  
of a lake.

The lake flows into a river.  
A child could **wade** across here.  
This is where the mighty **Mississippi River** begins.



Children scramble across rocks at the border between Lake Itasca and the Mississippi River.

## The Mighty Mississippi



Many rivers flow into the Mississippi. That's why the river gets bigger and bigger as it rolls along.

The water will travel through  
ten of the fifty United States.  
It will take three months to reach  
the sea.





This lock (left) on the Upper Mississippi can raise or lower boats. Then they can pass around the dam (right) and continue along the river.

## The Upper River

At first, the river flows through many **locks** and **dams**.

Together, they make it safe for boats to travel.

They hold back water so boats don't hit the river bottom.

Boats on this part of the river carry wheat and corn down south.  
The grain helps feed the world.



Ground corn pours onto a barge in Iowa (top). A boat passes through Iowa, pushing a barge down the Mississippi (bottom).



Eight miles north of the St. Louis Arch (right), the Missouri joins the Mississippi (above).



A big, muddy river  
comes in from the west.  
It mixes with the clear waters  
of the Mississippi.  
The Mississippi grows wide  
and brown.



Three states meet where the Ohio River (right) joins the Mississippi River (left).

## **The Lower River**

Another big river comes in from the east.

It joins the Mississippi, too.

The river grows deep and even wider.



The Mississippi often **floods**.

The floods are messy, but they leave behind rich soil.



A Louisiana man rescues his cat after a flood in 2012. His home took on 12 feet (4 m) of water.



New Orleans, Louisiana

The lower part of the river has big cities, too.



The river gets deeper as it nears the Gulf of Mexico. Bigger ships appear here.

Boats carry iron and steel, rubber,  
paper, and wood.

Some of these things move back  
up the river.

Some move farther south.



## Animals Along the River



River otters  
play in the  
upper river.

Bald eagles  
nest in tall  
trees along the  
upper river.



Pallid sturgeon  
enter with  
the muddy  
Missouri River.

Alligators swim in  
the lower river,  
where the water  
is warmer.







This image from space shows the river's end. At the bottom left, the river empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

## The Mighty Mississippi

The rain that fell on the lake  
has reached the sea at last.  
Some of that water may return  
to the lake as rain some day.  
It may make the **journey** all  
over again.  
And again . . .

## **Glossary**

<b>dams</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	barriers that stop the flow of water (p. 7)
<b>floods</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	covers a large area of land with water (p. 11)
<b>journey</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a long trip (p. 15)
<b>locks</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	gated sections in a river or canal in which the water level is raised and lowered to allow ships and boats to pass (p. 7)
<b>Mississippi River</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a major river in the United States that flows from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico (p. 5)
<b>wade</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to walk in shallow water, such as at the edge of a beach (p. 5)

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Title page: A paddlewheel riverboat on the Mississippi River south of Memphis, Tennessee

Page 3: Two girls fish the Mississippi River in Minnesota.

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