

STUDY GUIDE***RIVERTALES***
A MULTICULTURAL ADVENTURE
with JOY KELLY**PRE-PERFORMANCE**

The Mississippi River is the mother of all the rivers in the United States; the Yangtze River runs over 3000 miles through China; the Amazon River feeds from the Amazon Rainforest and sustains a wealth of life in South America and the Nile running through Africa feeds the land, the people, and our imaginations. Why are rivers so important to life? Where did rivers come from and where do they go? Through bits of history and geography we will journey all over the world and look at the animals and people whose way of life is influenced directly by living and working on rivers. We will also look at the folktales and folk songs (sometimes sung in their native language) from various cultures surrounding rivers. And throughout the journey the audience will be invited to participate in song and movement celebrating the rivers of the world.

Because the program touches on various curriculum it would be helpful if students have a pre-performance lesson on what rivers are and why they are important to us. This could include discussion and a visit to any rivers nearby. Any legends, songs, history and industry surrounding these rivers or any river could be included in the lesson. The storyteller invites audience participation in singing the songs as well as verbal interaction.

THE STORIES***THE LEGEND OF THE OGUN RIVER***

This story comes from Nigeria in West Africa. It is part of the Yoruba culture. Yemoja is traditionally thought of as an ocean deity but this story is the exception to the rule. Ogun is the Yoruba deity of war, industry and iron. The story tells how, through a magical occurrence, a river in Nigeria was formed. Yemoja, after having an argument with Ogun, runs to a mountaintop and reaches her hands up to the sky in sadness, and gradually she changes into water streaming down the side of the mountain gathering in the valley to become the Ogun River. The story is a lesson in respect as well as an illustration of how rivers are formed from streams flowing downhill.

NORA AND THE AKEE

This is a traditional folk tale from Jamaica. It tells of a dry river, which only fills us with water when something is shared with it. Some rivers actually do run dry periodically. Of course this spells disaster in communities dependent upon the water. This story gives a magical as well as a moral quality to a dry river and we learn the importance of sharing. There is also a lesson in the physical power of rivers. If nothing is shared, the river will rise and “wash you away!” The traditional folk tale ends in someone actually getting washed away. At this point the storyteller will lead the audience in creating a happier outcome with emphasis on the importance of sharing.

THE FISH AT DRAGON’S GATE

In Chinese folklore, there is the belief that dragons protect all rivers. This story explains why there are so many rivers in China and why dragons protect them. The Yellow Emperor, the god of the sky, is angry with the people because of the bad things they do. To punish them, he sends the rain god to make a ferocious downpour and create flooding. The Emperor’s grandson, Kun, takes pity on the people and through magic and transformation stops the rain, and in doing so, rivers and islands are created and some of the fish become dragons.

WHY PEOPLE SPEAK DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

This is a Native American folk tale from the Seneca People in New York State. A village has a river running right through the center of it. Only a bridge connects the two sides. At first the people on either side live in harmony with each other, until a very special dog is born, creating jealousy and envy between the people. This causes great concern for their chief, Godasiyo. She gradually realizes that more than just a river divided the village. It is up to Godasiyo to bring back peace and harmony, and the river helps her decide how to do it.

SALLY ANN THUNDER ANN WHIRLWIND CROCKET MEETS MIKE FINK

Mike Fink is a Mississippi riverboat captain in American folklore. He is known for his strength and fearlessness and he likes to brag about it. During one of his bragging sessions, a bet is made between Mike and Davy Crocket, whose wife is also known for her strength and fearlessness. Who can scare the other the most? Mike or Sally Ann?

THE RIVER THAT GAVE GIFTS

This tender story tells of four children concerned about their special friend, an older woman, Neema, who is losing her sight. The children decide to each make a gift for her. One of the children, a girl named Yanava, is not very good at making things, so she sits by the river to decide what to do. The river gives her the answer, and we learn that each of us has something to give.

THE SONGS

There are many songs about rivers. Some are very familiar, and others not so familiar. I have chosen a combination of both.

- “Down by the Riverside” (traditional spiritual)
- “Yemoja Olodo” (traditional Yoruba song)
- “The River that Flows Both Ways” (by Pete Seeger)
- “Erie Cana” (American folk song)
- “Oh Shenandoah” (American folk song)
- “New River Train” (American folk song)
- “Somos el Barco” (by Lorre Wyatt)

POST-PERFORMANCE

1) SOCIAL STUDIES, CULTURAL STUDIES, GEOGRAPHY, MATH

Because of the multicultural aspect of the performance, it would be a good idea to look at the different cultures.

A) Using a world map or globe, try to find the different countries mentioned:

- Nigeria in West Africa
- Jamaica in the Caribbean
- China in Asia
- New York in the United States

B) Now see if you can find the four longest rivers in the world:

- Nile River in Africa - 4,160 miles long
- Amazon River in South America - 4,000 miles long
- Yangtze River in Asia - 3,964 miles long
- Mississippi River in North America - 3,892 miles long

Look at how long they are. How many feet is that? Could anyone swim that length?

C) Many countries have celebrations about rivers. Many rivers have festivals and sing and dance for the river. Some float special gifts in the river. What kind of celebration would you like to do for the river? Write a song, story, or poem about a river close to where you live. Why are rivers so important that we celebrate them? You can include that in what you write. You can also draw a picture of the river with all of the animals that live nearby.

2) WRITING, MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

A) There have been many beautiful musical pieces inspired by rivers and other bodies of water. “On the Beautiful Blue Danube” by Johann Strauss, Jr. is a famous classical piece of music about the Danube River in Eastern Europe. The composer, Ravel, wrote another piece about water called “Water Games” (Jeux d’Eau). “The Grand Canyon Suite” by Ferde Grofe has a section called “Cloudburst” about a rainstorm in the Grand Canyon. Listen to some music written about water and write what could be happening.

- B) There is a dance production from Ireland called “Riverdance.” What kind of dance or movement could you create for the river? You can also use a large cloth and as you listen to music make the cloth dance like ripples or waves.
- C) In the performance, I used a rainstick that imitates the sound of rain. This instrument is used in various cultures all over the world. I also used another instrument called an Mbira or Kalimba that is played in Africa. To me, this instrument sounds like water. In different Native American cultures, a flute is sometimes used to make the sound of water. Can you think of any other musical instruments that can sound like water? Can you make a sound like water with your body? What about the sounds of the animals that live nearby? In a small group, try to recreate the sounds of the Amazon rainforest with each person choosing one sound that would be in the rainforest (animals, trees and leaves, rainfall, wind, etc).

3) ***SCIENCE - SOME SIMPLE EXPERIMENTS***

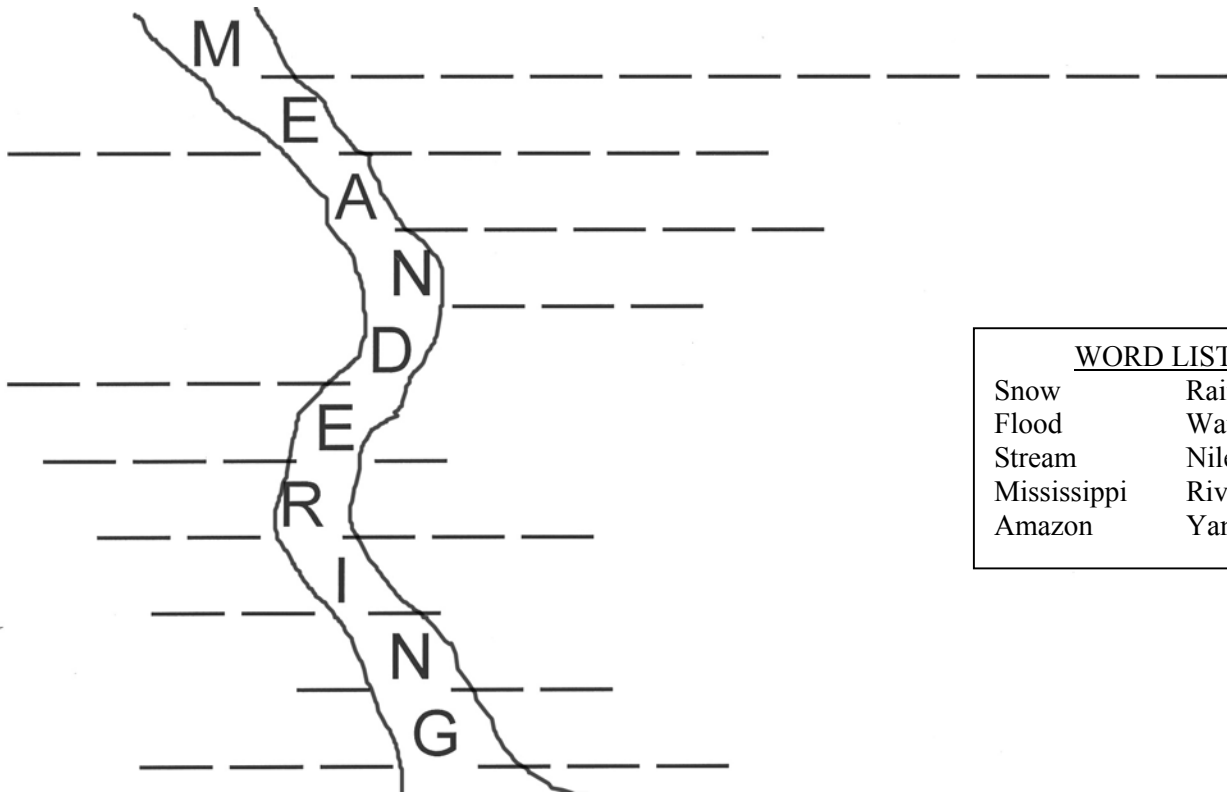
- A) Rivers are formed by snow or rain flowing downhill. The water forms streams that eventually come together and create a river. The river, however, continues to flow until it reaches a larger body of water. Some of the water becomes mist or fog or evaporates and goes up to the clouds. The clouds make it rain or snow and the water falls back down to the earth and the cycle begins again. This is called the Water Cycle. Draw a picture of one part of the water cycle along with other members of your class, each person drawing a different part. When everyone has finished, connect the pictures to create a large circle that shows how the Water Cycle works.
- B) Rivers and streams also change the way the earth looks. To see how this happens, put some sand in a bowl. Place a coin on the sand and set the bowl outside in a space so that rain can fall on it. After the rain, look at how the coin protected just the sand underneath it, and the rain beat down the rest of the sand.
- C) You can also make a stream tray with a large wooden or plastic box (4" deep, 22" wide, and 48" long). Put a plastic sheet in the box so that it overlaps the sides. Fill the box about halfway with sand. Place the box in a diagonal position carefully so that the sand does not spill out. Attach a water hose to one end. Place a bucket on the floor at the other end to catch any water. Turn on the water so that it only makes a trickle. The water will slowly seep into the sand. After an hour or two, look at the pattern the water has made. This is called meandering. Rivers and streams do the same thing. Over a very long period of time (many years), the river can actually carve out the earth. The Grand Canyon in Colorado was created this way by the Colorado River that still flows at the bottom of it.
- D) Rivers and streams also move things as they flow. Get a bowl and place a can or beaker in the center of it. Fill the can or beaker with sand. Now put water in the bowl, but not so high that it overflows into the can or beaker. Sprinkle a thin layer of sand in the water in the bowl. Slowly stir the water. If you stir very slowly, the water barely moves and the sand in it remains at the bottom. The water remains clear. Now experiment with stirring faster and faster. You will notice the sand also gets stirred up. The ripples and waves in rivers also stir up the plants and earth at the bottom. Often this is carried along as the river flows towards the ocean. Some rivers and streams look dark and murky. Other rivers and streams look very clear. Why?

A PUZZLE!

Look at the unusual shape of this word. Color the river that flows through the word “meandering” with a blue crayon. The shape and color show you what “meandering” means. What do you think it means?

Many rivers meander. The older the river, the less it meanders. Why do you think that happens?

Now fill in the blanks using the word list. These are all things made of water. Which ones meander? Which ones are rivers?



Can you think of other things made of water? See how long a list you can make.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Some of the stories, songs, and information I got from “word of mouth”, and others from books and recordings. Here is a list of the written references I used:

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