

Steamboat A-Comin'!

Before there were cars or trains or planes, the only way to get around was to walk or ride a horse. If people were near a river, they could use a boat. Most boats were very slow. They could only travel as fast as the wind blew. All that changed when the steamboat came along. Steamboats don't use wind. Instead they use steam power to turn a large paddle wheel. The wheel pushes the boat forward. The first steamboats were not fast. In fact, they could only go upriver at the rate of three miles an hour. You can ride your bike faster than that! But steamboats soon got faster and more popular. Within a few years, thousands of steamboats filled the Mississippi River. Traveling by steamboat was more comfortable than riding along a bumpy road. Steamboats were like floating hotels. They were richly decorated and had chefs, musicians, butlers, and maids. Despite the comfort, it was a dangerous way to travel. Steamboat boiler explosions were common. There were accidents with other boats. A steamboat captain had to take great care not to ground his boat on a hidden sandbar or catch the boat on an underwater snag. In the first forty years of steamboat use, four thousand people died in accidents. Even with the risks, steamboats remained popular. For fifty years they were the main way to move goods—mostly cotton and sugar—and people. By 1870, steamboat travel was replaced by railroads. Now very few steamboats are used, but the call of “steamboat a-comin!” can still call up images of a time long gone.

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.
words read in 1 minute				
– number of mistakes				
= total words read correctly				
adult initials				

Parent Tips

Scientific-based research reviews have established that reading fluency is a critical component of learning to read and that an effective reading program needs to include instruction in fluency. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for example, found that nearly half of American fourth graders had not achieved a minimal level of fluency in their reading, which was associated with significant difficulties in comprehension while reading silently.

--Timothy V. Rasinski, Ph.D., *Assessing Reading Fluency*



1. How fast was the first steamboat?

- o It sailed 3 miles an hour.
- o It sailed 17 miles an hour.
- o It sailed 50 miles an hour.

2. What is the main idea of this passage?

- o Steamboats were invented a long time ago.
- o Steamboats helped people get around more easily.
- o Steamboats had maids, butlers, and musicians.

3. A detail that supports the main idea is:

- o Steamboat passengers liked musicians.
- o There were often explosions on steamboats.
- o Steamboats were faster than sailboats.

4. Would you rather travel a long way on a steamboat or in a car? Why?