



The Age of Steamers

Film Summary: This vignette provides insight into the role that steamship transportation played in the lives of workers in the early years of transportation. Not only was the steamship important to resource workers to get to the job, but for many isolated communities, steamships were a connection to the outside world.

**Curriculum
Application: Social
Studies 9**

The Essential Question:

How did steamships play a role in building community in early British Columbia?

Summary of the Lesson Activities

1. Focus questions for the vignette provide a short lesson option. (15 minutes)
2. Extension questions are provided to explore the role of transportation in making change in contemporary society.
3. Students can pursue research questions about workers and transportation today.

Learning Standards

1. Students will explore how the physical environment influences the nature of political, social, and economic change in early British Columbia.
2. Students will explore *technological* revolutions in transportation technology and the impact they have on societies past and present.
3. Students will assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their historical significance at particular times and places, and from group to group.

Materials and Resources Provided

- [The Age of Steamers- Working People-A History of Labour in British Columbia](#)
- **Lesson Activity 1**
- **Appendix 1**

Additional Suggested Materials

- [SS Sicamous Society. History of the Paddlewheeler on the Okanagan Lakes](#)
- [The Bowen Island Heritage Society has historical information on the Union Steamships](#)
- [Steamboats on the Kootenay Lake](#) a Historical Benchmarks lesson plan
- [Historic Yale Site](#)
- [S.S. Moyie National Historic Site](#)

Vignette Questions

1. What were some of the geographic challenges faced by workers trying to get to the resources of British Columbia's interior in the mid to late 19th century?
2. In what ways did the steamships positively help workers and communities?
3. In what ways did the steamships negatively affect workers and communities?
4. What risks were involved in early steamship transportation in BC?
5. Why did the steamship age end?

Lesson Activities

1. Distribute the background information (Lesson Activity 1) and discuss the pre-viewing questions as a class.
2. View vignette and have the students respond to the questions above individually or in small groups. Discuss responses as a class
3. Explore the impact of transportation technology and change in other parts of the Province of British Columbia. Coastal communities were greatly affected by the Union Steamship Company; the Okanagan and Kootenay Lakes both operated Steamship services in their regions.
4. Create a map of early British Columbia and locate the important inland waterways and communities that developed along the trade routes.
5. Explore how technological innovations have created new transportation opportunities in your region of the province? Discuss the positive and negative impacts of these changes.
6. Extension opportunity, students pursue some of the recent issues in transportation safety listed on the discussion handout. (Appendix 1)

Credit: Teaching Activities and Lesson Plan developed by Wayne Axford and the LHP

Working People: A History of Labour in BC

Lesson Activity 1

Lesson: The Age of Steamers

Not only was the steamship important for resource workers to get to the job opportunities, but for many isolated communities the steamships were a connection to the outside world. Aside from these benefits, steamships were often dangerous and many crew and passengers died as a result of treacherous waters, absence of safety standards, unworthy vessels, and high pressure steam accidents.

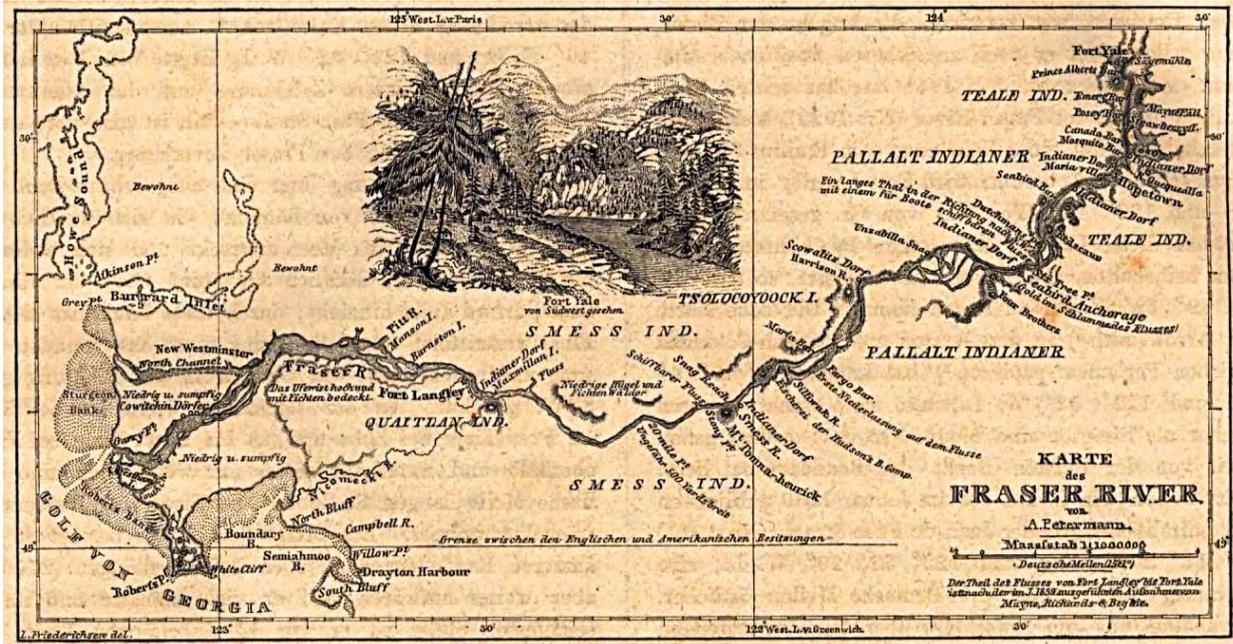
Captains would often race each other on the rivers and lakes to gain a competitive edge. Sinkings were common place along the rivers and lakes. In the winter months there was the risk of being frozen in on many of interior waterways. During the Fraser River Gold Rush in 1858, the paddlewheeler Enterprise was caught between Fort Hope and Fort Langley in a freak cold spell and frozen into place. Passengers had to abandon the ship and attempt to walk to Fort Langley.

Crew on the ships worked seven day weeks, with long hours and low pay in addition to the dangerous working conditions. In many cases, employers hired whites, First Nations and Chinese workers and then created racial division to either reduce wages or increase competition between workers.

The arrival of Steamships along the provinces waterways provided important economic links between communities that led to the economic development of British Columbia's diverse resource industries. Many BC towns owe their origins to the early steamship industry.

Vignette Focus Questions

1. What were some of the geographic challenges faced by workers trying to get to the resources of British Columbia's interior in the mid to late 19th century?
 2. In what ways did the steamships positively help workers and communities?
 3. In what ways did the steamships negatively affect workers and communities?
 4. What risks were involved in early steamship transportation in BC?
 5. Why did the steamship age end?
- A. For General Interest: Watch a vintage film showing the Train/Steamship connection on the Kootenay Lake region. [Video of CPR Steam Train and SS Moyie on the Kooetnay Lake 1939](#)
- B. Critical Challenge: Investigate the impact of the steamship services on the First Nations of the Fraser River.



This historic map of early British Columbia circa 1859 is done by a German Cartographer. Common place names along the Steamship route to Yale are clearly identified. Note map is of high resolution and can be projected for enhanced viewing.

Map source: [University of Texas](#)

Topics for further study:

- 1.) Examine some of the following topics to enrich your understanding of transportation, safety, and work in British Columbia in the current time period.
 1. Deaths of farmworkers in highway crashes of unsafe, modified vans
 2. Railway safety for passengers and crew today
 3. Young workers and others working late night shifts
 4. Long haul truck drivers
 5. Safety of public transit
 6. Personal safety of bus or taxi drivers
 7. Dangerous highways to present day resource boom communities.