

# Teaching Guide to *Shortcuts* by Jeff Harris

## Introduction

*Shortcuts* by Jeff Harris is a beautifully illustrated, fact-packed page that makes learning fun. Each week, *Shortcuts'* multicultural cast (Juanita, K., Roland, Junior and James) offers facts, riddles, jokes and puzzles to help kids learn about science, geography, animals, food, history and holidays.

Each teaching guide provides ideas for expanding the lesson and creating discussion and learning activities for your students. The grade level for the guides is usually 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>, but they can be adapted for use at other levels. The guides are broken down into four areas :

### **1. Questions for Discussion and Further Study**

Designed to help students think and research, not just give one-word answers

### **2. Activity Ideas**

Designed to allow students to be creative and teach themselves

### **3. Use the News**

Designed to have students use the news in studying each topic

### **4. Quick Quiz**

Designed to be adaptable to several grade levels, evaluate students' comprehension and build vocabulary and math skills

You might use the teaching guides in the following ways:

**Questions for Discussion and Further Study:** Engage the entire class by asking each question aloud and listing the students' answers on the board. Or have them use reference resources to give their own answers to the questions. Allow them to discuss other students' answers after they've researched the topics. Key words or phrases that can help students search for more information are italicized.

**Activity Ideas:** Give the students a time limit to research their projects, using library or study time. By having the students cite their resources you can check their work; or, alternatively, tell them which resource(s) you prefer them to use.

**Use the News:** These can be worked on individually but we suggest they work in groups to learn teamwork skills.

- **Quick Quiz:** We suggest you review the quizzes ahead of time and change the phrasing or difficulty level based on the students' abilities.

# **Shortcuts: THE MIGHTY MISSISSIPPI RIVER**

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**Objective:** After completing the exercises, students should have a better understanding of the Mississippi River.

**Subject Areas:** The following information about the Mississippi River will be discussed:

- Geography of the Mississippi River
- Mississippi River in literature and film
- River delta facts

**Evaluation:** Students may be evaluated using the following point scale:

*Four points:* Information is accurate, organized, shows creative thought/use of materials

*Three points:* Information is accurate and organized

*Two points:* Information is mostly accurate; organization needs some work

*One point:* Significant inaccuracies; lacks organization

## **Topics for Discussion and Further Study**

1. How did paddle-wheel steamboats work?
2. What is the average and greatest depth in the Mississippi River?

## **Activity Ideas**

- Take a cruise down the Mississippi River. Use Google maps to find the beginning at Lake Itasca in Minnesota, and then just follow the river on the map until you find yourself in the Gulf of Mexico. (The stretch from Lake Itasca to Minneapolis, Minnesota, is pretty hard to follow. You may want to just start from Minneapolis.) How far did you travel? What states did you pass through? What large cities did you pass by? What other rivers fed into the Mississippi River?
- Mark Twain's novel "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is an American classic about a poor white boy and a black slave traveling down the Mississippi River together. The story would be an interesting novel study for the class. For a quick examination of the story there are a few movie versions, such as the 1993 Disney film "The Adventures of Huck Finn." There are also several graphic novel versions, such the edition as from Barron's Graphic Classics.

### **Use the News**

- The Mississippi River delta (what is a delta?) was severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. Use back issues of newspapers or the Internet to read about news stories surrounding the ecological damage that was done.

## **Answers to the Quiz**

1.) b, 2.) b, 3.) a, 4.) a, 5.) b, 6.) c , 7.) big river, 8.) watershed 9.) 144 miles , 10.) 0 miles

# Quick Quiz — The Mississippi River

1. The Mississippi River is the longest river in North America.  
a. True b. False
2. It takes about \_\_\_\_\_ months for water in the Mississippi river to travel from its headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico.  
a. one b. three c. ten d. eighteen
3. In 1812, an earthquake actually made parts of the river flow backward.  
a. True b. False
4. The American author \_\_\_\_\_ based many of his books on life along the Mississippi.  
a. Mark Twain b. Edgar Allan Poe c. Tom Sawyer d. Ernest Hemingway
5. During the 1800s, most travel along the Mississippi was done in locomotives.  
a. True b. False
6. The headwaters of the Mississippi River start in the state of \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Mississippi b. Texas c. Minnesota d. Michigan

## Vocabulary Comprehension

7. Mississippi means \_\_\_\_\_, and was named long ago by tribes living near its banks.
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an area of land that drains into a river.

## Math Comprehension (subtraction, division, addition, fractions)

9. If the water in a river flows 6 mph, how far will it flow in a day?
10. If the river is flowing 6 mph, and a boat travels at 6 mph against the current, how far will it have gone in one hour?