



QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER*

What is the Mississippi? Where does it start and end? How many states contribute to its flow? Among other world rivers how does it compare? Is the Mississippi a **ribbon of water** in a ditch that starts at Minnesota's Lake Itasca and ends at the Gulf of Mexico? Or is it a **watershed** - and does the Mississippi therefore *start* anywhere rain or snow falls in its watershed? Does it *end* at all? Is the Mississippi = H₂O + sediment + pollutants, or is it an **ecosystem**? Is it dead or alive? **Are we part of it?** Can science define it? Can art describe it? Is it a living poem waiting to be read? How would you define the Mississippi?

Have you had a **drink of water** today? Where did that water come from? How many people in the Twin Cities, or along the whole Mississippi River, get their drinking water from the river? **How much of your body is water?** If you drink water from the Mississippi River, could your body be more river water than anything else? If so, how connected are you with the river? If you pollute the river, are you polluting yourself?

How many **cultures of people** have lived here along the river? Where around the Twin Cities can evidence of past river cultures be found? What people refer to the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers as the **Center of the Earth** ("Makoce Cokaya Kin")? Why do they call it that?

Who were the **earliest non-Native American explorers** to visit our area? Where did they come from? How did they travel? What legacies have their explorations left us?

What are the reasons the "Twin Cities" of Minneapolis and St. Paul began? Why are there "*Twin*" Cities; why are they located where they are? What does the Mississippi River have to do with them?

Where in the Twin Cities was there once a waterfall greater than present-day Niagara Falls that was one of the **greatest waterfalls** ever seen in North America? When did it occur? What happened to it? How does it relate to previous question about why there are Twin Cities?

Why do some scientists say that the Mississippi River is the **most important river ecosystem** in the Northern Hemisphere?

What's a **flood plain ecosystem**? Why are **floods**, or periodic cycles of high and low water, important for the river?

Why is the river so important for **birds**? How do birds make a living on the Mississippi River? What's meant by the "**Mississippi Flyway**"?

What's a **native species**? What's an **exotic species**? Why do they matter to the river? How do exotic species affect native species? How are river species dependent on each other? Can you give an example?

How long has the Mississippi River been used for **transportation**? Where in the Twin Cities can we find the earliest evidence of this? What do **barges** carry on the river; where are they coming from, and where are they going? What percentage of U.S. grain exports is shipped on the Mississippi River? What's it like to be a **riverboat pilot**?

How do our everyday choices – such as the food we buy, or how we get around – affect the river? How does a cornfield or a **lawn** affect the river? Where does your **street flow**? Is the water that goes down storm drains (street drains) treated (cleaned) before it goes wherever it goes after that?

How can **aquatic invertebrates** (bugs) tell us about the river's health? What's the significance of **mayflies** on the MR?

Is the river **dirtier or cleaner** than it was twenty years ago? ...or fifty years ago? ...150 years ago? How do we know? What information about this can we get from **explorers' journals**? ...or animals?

How can we **care** for a river? What **actions** can we take to help the river? If you help to take care of the river, are you also taking care of yourself? How?

How has the river been changed by forces of nature? ...hands of people? Is the river still **changing**? How? What **future history** will be made of our time along this river? How are people's **values** reflected in the river environment? How can we influence the future of the river? Can we do it now? Do we influence the river whether we intend to or not?

Why do so many people **write** and make **art** about the Mississippi River?

** Answers to these questions and others can be found or explored through activities conducted as part of Big River Journey or Journey to the Falls (in the classroom, on field trips, and in the community) – or by learning on your own!*