

They Came to Wisconsin and They're Still Coming: Immigration and Settlement

Activity 6.1: John Kroehnke's Journey on the Erie Canal

Teacher Materials

Preparation/Organization Students will work with their own copies of the worksheets, so you will need to prepare enough copies of Student Pages 1–3 in advance. This activity allows for flexible classroom management. You can allow students to work on their own, either supervised or unsupervised, or in small groups. Alternatively, you could work on the activity as a whole class, having different students read the diary entries aloud before the group answers the questions.

Procedure

1. Remind students that many immigrants came to Wisconsin during the first half of the nineteenth century. (**Note:** If you are going to have students work in groups, now is the time to form the groups.) Then distribute Student Pages 1–3 and have a volunteer read aloud the three paragraphs at the top of the first page.
2. Then discuss the first passage and its three questions. Help students understand what is being described and then guide them in formulating their answers.
3. Once students have shown that they can read the material and answer the questions, have them continue with the other passages and questions, working individually, in small groups, or as a whole class.
4. When students have finished, reconvene the class and discuss the responses. Pay particular attention to any answers that students could not find or got “wrong,” working with them to find correct responses.

Answers

Answers will vary somewhat. Accept reasonable answers.

1. 50 ft. x 15 ft.
2. On boxes in the main room.
3. They were suspicious when they went into the first lock.
4. They complained about having to stop every time they meet another boat.
5. Things carried west were manufactured goods, equipment, and tools. Things carried east were more likely to be raw materials: meat, grains, lumber, coal, wool.
6. John Kroehnke enjoyed seeing and hearing blossoming fruit trees, snakes, bullfrogs, and other frogs that sounded like birds.

7. While people waited for the boat to go through a lock, or when the boat went very slowly people explored the surrounding area or walked along beside the boat.
8. People on deck bent down when sailors yelled, “High bridge!”
9. People on deck lay flat on the deck when sailors yelled, “Low bridge!”
10. When there was a boat pile-up and long delays, sailors got very grouchy and began swearing at each other and even cut each other’s tow-ropes.

Name _____ Date _____

Activity 6.1 John Kroehnke's Journey on the Erie Canal

John O. Kroehnke (**kron** key) and his family were among the many immigrants who traveled west through the Erie Canal during the first half of the 1800s. In late March 1848, they left their home in northern Germany to immigrate to Wisconsin. They sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, arriving in New York on May 11. Then they sailed up the Hudson River to reach the Erie Canal.

John Kroehnke kept a journal that describes their trip through the Erie Canal. Their boat was a barge that was pulled by two horses that walked on a path alongside the waterway. In his journal Kroehnke describes the towns and the passing sights and gives readers a feeling for what the experience was like.

Read each passage from John Kroehnke's journal. Then answer the questions about what you learned from each entry.

Passage 1

Sunday, May 1. The canal boats have different sizes, ours was about 50 feet long and about 15 feet wide, all have a flat floor. . . . In front is the cabin, where our wives and children were. . . and the rest of us prepared our beds in the main-room on boxes, which, of course, were not very comfortable. . . . Soon we drove into a water lock. We all were kind of suspicious. After the lock-doors had been closed behind us valves in the front lock were opened, the water ran into our part and we were lifted up until we reached the level of the front part of the canal. When this was finished, the front doors were opened and we could continue. We were still going through 7 or 8 more water locks which **elevated** [lifted] us about 10 to 12 feet.

1. What was the size of the boat? _____
2. Where did the men sleep? _____
3. How did people feel as they went into the first lock? _____

Passage 2

Monday, May 15. Today we did not advance very much since the traffic on the canal is big and we have to stop every time another boat is meeting us. Sometimes it took us more than half an hour to get enough space to continue our voyage. The boats going in the same direction as we did, [west] into the land, had a few passengers with them, most of the things they carried were . . . manufactured goods . . . and iron goods, railroad trucks, nails and agricultural tools. The boats going in [the] opposite direction had salted meat, bacon in barrels, flour, corn, wheat, roof shingle, boards, all kinds of wood, coal, wool, skin and living pigs, etc.

4. What was one complaint about traveling by boat? _____
5. How did the things being carried west differ from those carried east? _____

Name _____ Date _____

Passage 3

Wednesday, May 17. Our trip brought us through cities and villages, through plains and hilly parts of the country, pretty big fruit trees just blossoming were a joy for our eyes. . . . We saw sometimes small . . . snakes and heard, for the first time, the sound of “bull-frogs” . . . The tone of them is almost as deep as the one of a bull and that is why they are called bullfrog. . . . Smaller frogs could be found here very numerous, they were quacking with a lighter voice. . . . We thought first that they were bird[s]. . . .

6. What sights and sounds of nature did John Kroehnke enjoy on May 17? _____

Passage 4

Thursday, May 18 to Sunday, May 21. My diary has not been written during these days because of the always new appearing sights there is no time to write. . . . In spite of the fact that we could have made the trip in 36 hours going by train, we were glad to have chosen the canal-trip, because the trip was much more interesting. Usually the deck of the canal-boat is occupied with people. Are we meeting a bridge—and we are meeting a lot of them—the marines are calling: “High bridge” or “low bridge.” Did we meet a high bridge it was sufficient only to bend down, but did we meet a low bridge we had to lie down on the deck. Sometimes we **promenaded** [walked] beside the boat, especially when the speed was low. The horses and their leaders are changing every 6 to 8 hours. Sometimes it is fun to watch when the boats are stopped because of the fact that each of them wants to be the first one and they are piling up and delay the whole trip. A couple of days ago our rope was cut by a similar occasion. There was a lot of swearing and they almost started a fight. If two boats meet one lowers his rope and lets the other one pass over it.

7. What did people do while they waited for the boat to go through a lock or when the boat went very slowly? _____

8. What did people on deck do when the sailors yelled, “High bridge”? _____

9. What did people on deck do when the sailors yelled, “Low bridge”? _____

10. What happened to the sailors’ tempers when there was a boat pile-up and long delays?

Name _____ Date _____

The Rest of the Story

Some of the people from the canal boat, including John Kroehnke, took the train to Niagara Falls. From there they went on to Buffalo, New York, where they met up with the canal boat. At Buffalo the Kroehnkes stayed one more night on the canal boat. Then they boarded a steamboat to cross three Great Lakes—Lake Erie, Lake Huron, and Lake Michigan. They arrived in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, in late May, months after leaving their home in Germany.

From Sheboygan they traveled overland, going northwest about twenty miles to New Holstein in Calumet County, where they were to establish a farm. It was a long journey to a new life. Soon after his arrival John Kroehnke filed papers on 360 acres near Lake Winnebago. Kroehnke remained on this farm at least until 1850. The next ten years are undocumented by diaries, but in 1861 the coverage resumed, and he was a painter living in Sheboygan. Prior to this move Kroehnke's first wife had died. In Sheboygan he married his second wife, Gretchen, with whom he had six more children, four of whom survived to adulthood.