

## Paddlewheel Steamboats

### TRANSPORTATION LESSON 1

Tourism has been an important part of Florida's history long before Walt Disney opened his Magic Kingdom in 1971. In fact, more than 100 years earlier, paddlewheel steamboats carried some of Florida's first tourists down the St. Johns River into the Central Florida wilderness.

These boats, which were propelled through the water by a turning paddlewheel that was pushed by a steam-powered engine, were great at moving along the river because they were able to navigate shallow water. Paddlewheel steamers were very important in Florida's history, because they made it much easier for people to travel to the inland parts of Central Florida. Before steamboats were used, most of the action in Florida happened along the coasts because sailing ships could not travel inland.



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# History AT HOME

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When steamboats began making their way down the St. Johns River in the 1850s, they opened up Central Florida in a way not possible before. With these boats, the St. Johns was able to act as an artery carrying goods and passengers well before cars and railroads would arrive in our state. The ability to ship goods up and down the river made Florida – already famed for its warm climate – much more enticing to people wanting to settle here to make their fortunes in agriculture.

Of course, just like today, people from the North wanted to come to Florida in the winter months to soak up the sun, and steamboats allowed them to do that much more easily. Following the Civil War, Florida's tourism industry was born as wealthy northerners made their way up the St. Johns River. They would hop on a steamboat in Jacksonville and travel south to Sanford and other towns that boasted fancy hotels. Along the way, visitors would marvel at what they saw as exotic Florida foliage and wildlife. In fact, some passengers might even try to hunt Florida gators from the boat's deck along the way!



Matheson Museum of History

## Paddlewheel Steamboats ACTIVITY

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Small, shallow plastic food-storage container
- 2 pencils
- 3 rubber bands
- 4 foam shapes (or you can cut shapes out of sturdy cardboard)
- Scissors
- Large, long plastic container, dishpan, or other type of basin (or you can use a bathtub or pool to test your paddleboat)



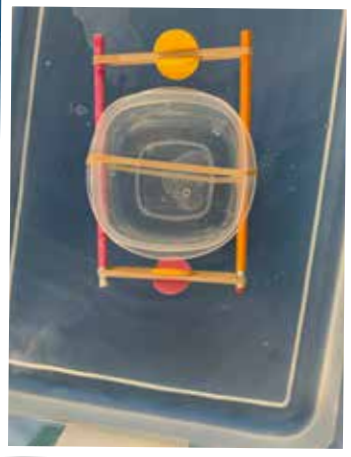
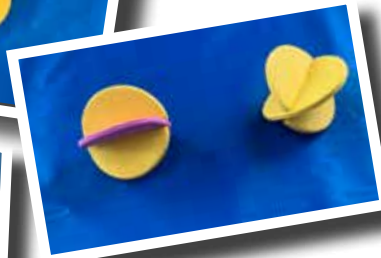


# Paddlewheel Steamboats

## ACTIVITY

### WHAT TO DO:

1. Attach the pencils on both sides of the container using a rubber band in the middle.
2. Stabilize the pencils by wrapping a rubber band around them at each end.
3. Cut into your foam shapes across the middle, only cutting in halfway on each.
4. Fit two foam shapes together by sliding them into each other's cuts. These will be your paddlewheels and your boat will have one on each end.
5. Secure the paddlewheels to the boat by slipping them between the rubber bands on each end.
6. Fill your tote (or tub or pool) with water and place your boat in.
7. Spin the paddlewheel (twisting the rubber band too) and release to propel your boat across the water. You can use one or both paddlewheels (just make sure to spin them both in the same directions).



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CENTER**

DOWNTOWN ORLANDO

TheHistoryCenter.Org

## Additional Resources:

Bass, Bob. *When Steamboats Reigned in Florida*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008.

<https://www.metrojacksonville.com/article/2012-jul-the-steamships-of-jacksonville/page/>

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ahistoryofcentralfloridapodcast/18/>

<http://www.steamboats.org/history-education/eexplore/virtual-steamboat-paddlewheel.html>

<http://www.theriverreturns.org/explore/history/text/19/>



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## This lesson helps reinforce these Florida State Standards for K-5th grade:

- SS.1.A.2.1 Understand history tells the story of people and events of other times and places.
- SS.1.A.2.2 Compare life now with life in the past.
- SS.4.A.4.1 Explain the effects of technological advances on Florida.
- SS.4.A.6.1 Describe the economic development of Florida's major industries.
- SS.4.A.8.4 Explain how tourism affects Florida's economy and growth.
- SS.5.A.6.3 Examine the 19th century advancements (canals, roads, steamboats, flat boats, over-land wagons, Pony express, railroads) in transportation and communication.

