

Tales *of the* Towpath



*A curriculum about
coal, canals and the growth of America*

OVERVIEW

The “Tales of the Towpath” traveling trunks curriculum offers 4th- and 5th-grade students a unique opportunity to explore mid-19th century life along the Lehigh and Delaware canals and understand the canals’ importance in the growth of the American Industrial Revolution.

Developed by an advisory committee comprised of teachers, principals, curriculum coordinators and local historians living in the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor (D&L), the “Tales of the Towpath” curriculum is centered on a storybook of the same name written by D&L Outreach Coordinator, Dennis Scholl. The book follows the life of a young Irish boy - Finn Gorman - whose father takes his family to America in 1846 and eventually becomes a canal boat captain. Young Finn’s adventures lead readers on a journey into the D&L’s past, when anthracite coal was fueling unbridled industrial and economic growth.

The curriculum includes an extensive variety of hands-on items representative of 19th-century life. They arrive at participating schools in reproduction 19th-century ship trunks made by the Advanced Woodworking Class at Moravian Academy’s Upper School in Bethlehem. Trunks rotate between schools on a four- to six-week schedule. A trunk’s inventory includes facsimile textbooks, boy’s and girl’s clothing, toys and games, and items that were found on canal boats and in coal mines. DVDs featuring historical footage of operating canal boats and the Switchback Railroad further enhance the curriculum. A music CD allows students to hear popular songs of the period. The trunks also hold student copies of the storybook.

Curriculum manuals are supplied to teachers at a required Act 48 summer training session provided by the D&L. Each manual includes standardized multidisciplinary lessons, a teacher’s version of the storybook, book glossary, extensive historical resources, and a list of field trip opportunities in the D&L related to the storybook. The curriculum binder also holds CDs that contain the entire printed curriculum - including color storybook illustrations - in digital form.

The project is currently in its pilot phase at schools in each of the D&L’s five counties: Freemansburg Elementary School, Bethlehem Area School District, Northampton County; Sheridan and Jefferson schools, Allentown School District, Lehigh County; Memorial Elementary School, Hanover Area School District, Luzerne County; Penn-Kidder Campus, Jim Thorpe School District, Carbon County; and five schools in Council Rock School District, Bucks County.

The project will be released to interested public, private, parochial, and home schools in Fall of 2009. “Tales of the Towpath” is free-of-charge to participating schools.

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