



## The Great Missouri River Printable Reading Comprehension

Word Count: 281 | Lexile 1000

The Missouri River is the longest river in North America, traveling roughly 2,341 miles from the Rocky Mountains of western Montana to its confluence with the Mississippi River near St. Louis, Missouri. Crossing plains, badlands, and broad valleys, the river links a vast interior watershed to the continent's larger river network.

The Missouri begins as snowmelt and mountain springs that gather into swift headwater streams. As it descends from high country to open prairie, the river slows, meanders, and picks up sediment. For thousands of years, this shifting channel built sandbars and side channels that provided habitat for fish and birds and created fertile bottoms for plants to take root.

Indigenous nations—including the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Lakota, and others—have long relied on the river for food, trade, and travel. In the early 1800s, the Lewis and Clark expedition followed the Missouri upstream, mapping routes and recording species as the United States sought to understand the newly acquired lands of the West. Their journals described a waterway both challenging and essential.

In the twentieth century, large dams and reservoirs were constructed along the upper Missouri and its tributaries. These projects provide hydroelectric power, irrigation water, navigation support, and flood control for downstream communities. Yet the same structures trap sediment, alter seasonal flows, and change water temperatures, which can affect native species such as pallid sturgeon and least terns.

Today, the Missouri River remains a working river and an ecological corridor. Barges move goods on managed stretches, while anglers and bird-watchers seek out quieter backwaters. Engineers, tribal leaders, farmers, and conservationists continue to debate how best to balance navigation, energy, agriculture, cultural resources, and habitat restoration along this dynamic system.

- 1. What makes the Missouri River especially significant in North America?**
  - a) It is the widest river on the continent.
  - b) It is the longest river in North America.
  - c) It is the fastest-moving river in the Rockies.
  - d) It connects directly to the Atlantic Ocean.

**2. How did the river's natural processes shape its environment before modern dams were built?**

- a) It stayed in one permanent channel, preventing erosion.
- b) It built sandbars and fertile bottoms that supported plants and animals.
- c) It ran underground for long distances, storing fresh water.
- d) It froze solid each winter, creating new land.

**3. Why did the Lewis and Clark expedition follow the Missouri River?**

- a) To claim land for the United States.
- b) To map routes and record species in the West.
- c) To establish trade routes with Europe.
- d) To build early reservoirs along the river.

**4. Which of the following is a consequence of building dams on the Missouri?**

- a) The river became longer.
- b) Navigation ended completely.
- c) Sediment was trapped and natural flows changed.
- d) Indigenous nations gained more farmland.

**5. Compare the Missouri River's role for Indigenous nations with its role today.**

**Which statement is most accurate?**

- a) Indigenous nations relied on it mainly for trade and travel, while today it also supports energy and navigation.
- b) Both in the past and today, the river is only used for fishing.
- c) Indigenous nations ignored the river, while today it is central to farming.
- d) The river was once used only for exploration, but today it is ignored.

**6. What does the phrase “working river” most likely mean in the passage?**

- a) A river that is entirely controlled by machines.
- b) A river that supports industry, farming, and transportation.
- c) A river that flows only part of the year.
- d) A river that is dangerous to explore.

**7. Which statement best summarizes the passage?**

- a) The Missouri River is important only as a tourist site.
- b) The Missouri River has played many roles, from supporting Indigenous life and exploration to providing modern resources, while raising debates about conservation.
- c) The Missouri River was once powerful, but dams have made it useless today.
- d) The Missouri River is more important than the Mississippi in every way.

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# Answer Key

1. b) It is the longest river in North America
2. b) It built sandbars and fertile bottoms that supported plants and animals
3. b) To map routes and record species in the West
4. c) Sediment was trapped and natural flows changed
5. a) Indigenous nations relied on it mainly for trade and travel, while today it also supports energy and navigation
6. b) A river that supports industry, farming, and transportation
7. b) The Missouri River has played many roles, from supporting Indigenous life and exploration to providing modern resources, while raising debates about conservation