Lesson Activity 1 Lesson: The Age of Steamers

Not only was the steamship important for resource workers to get to the job opportunities, but for many isolated communities the steamships were a connection to the outside world. Aside from these benefits, steamships were often dangerous and many crew and passengers died as a result of treacherous waters, absence of safety standards, unworthy vessels, and high pressure steam accidents.

Captains would often race each other on the rivers and lakes to gain a competitive edge. Sinkings were common place along the rivers and lakes. In the winter months there was the risk of being frozen in on many of interior waterways. During the Fraser River Gold Rush in 1858, the paddlewheeler Enterprise was caught between Fort Hope and Fort Langley in a freak cold spell and frozen into place. Passengers had to abandon the ship and attempt to walk to Fort Langley.

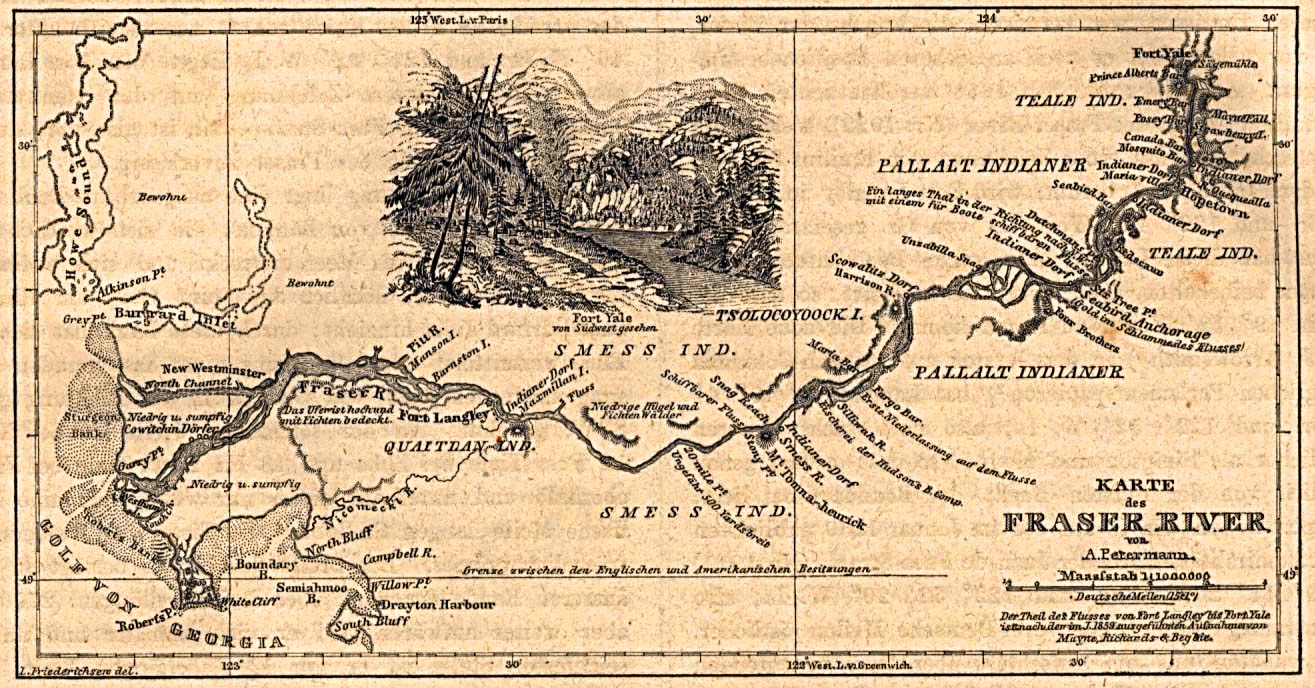
Crew on the ships worked seven day weeks, with long hours and low pay in addition to the dangerous working conditions. In many cases, employers hired whites, First Nations and Chinese workers and then created racial division to either reduce wages or increase competition between workers.

The arrival of Steamships along the provinces waterways provided important economic links between communities that led to the economic development of British Columbia’s diverse resource industries. Many BC towns owe their origins to the early steamhip industry.

Vignette Focus Questions

1. What were some of the geographic challenges faced by workers trying to get to the resources of British Columbia’s interior in the mid to late 19th century?
2. In what ways did the steamships positively help workers and communities?
3. In what ways did the steamships negatively affect workers and communities?
4. What risks were involved in early steamship transportation in BC?
5. Why did the steamship age end?
6. For General Interest: Watch a vintage film showing the Train/Steamhip connection on the Kootenay Lake region. [Video of CPR Steam Train and SS Moyie on the Kooetnay Lake 1939](https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=steamships+on+the+kootenay+lakes&&view=detail&mid=155F426D86CA12F28E63155F426D86CA12F28E63&FORM=VRDGAR)
7. Critical Challenge: Investigate the impact of the steamship services on the First Nations of the Fraser River.

Appendix 1 Lesson: The Age of Steamers



This historic map of early British Columbia circa 1859 is done by a German Cartographer. Common place names along the Steamhip route to Yale are clearly identified. Note map is of high resolution and can be projected for enhanced viewing.

**Map source:** [**University of Texas**](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/history_americas.html)

**Topics for further study:**

1. Examine some of the following topics to enrich your understanding of transportation, safety, and work in British Columbia in the current time period.
   * + 1. Deaths of farmworkers in highway crashes of unsafe, modified vans
       2. Railway safety for passengers and crew today
       3. Young workers and others working late night shifts
       4. Long haul truck drivers
       5. Safety of public transit
       6. Personal safety of bus or taxi drivers
       7. Dangerous highways to present day resource boom communities.