

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 arrives at participating schools in reproduction 19th-century ship trunks. Trunks rotate between schools on a four- to six-week schedule. Each trunk contains an inventory of items representative of 19th-century life along the canals and in coal towns. Included are: facsimile textbooks, boy’s and girl’s costumes, toys and games, and items that were found on canal boats and in coal mines. A DVD 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 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 a DVD that contains the entire printed curriculum, including storybook illustrations.

The project will be implemented in the following school districts this fall : Bethlehem, Northampton, Pen Argyl, Catasauqua and Wilson Area school districts in Northampton County; Allentown and Northern Lehigh school districts in Lehigh County; Hanover Area School District, Luzerne County; Jim Thorpe School District, Carbon County; and Council Rock School District, Bucks County.

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