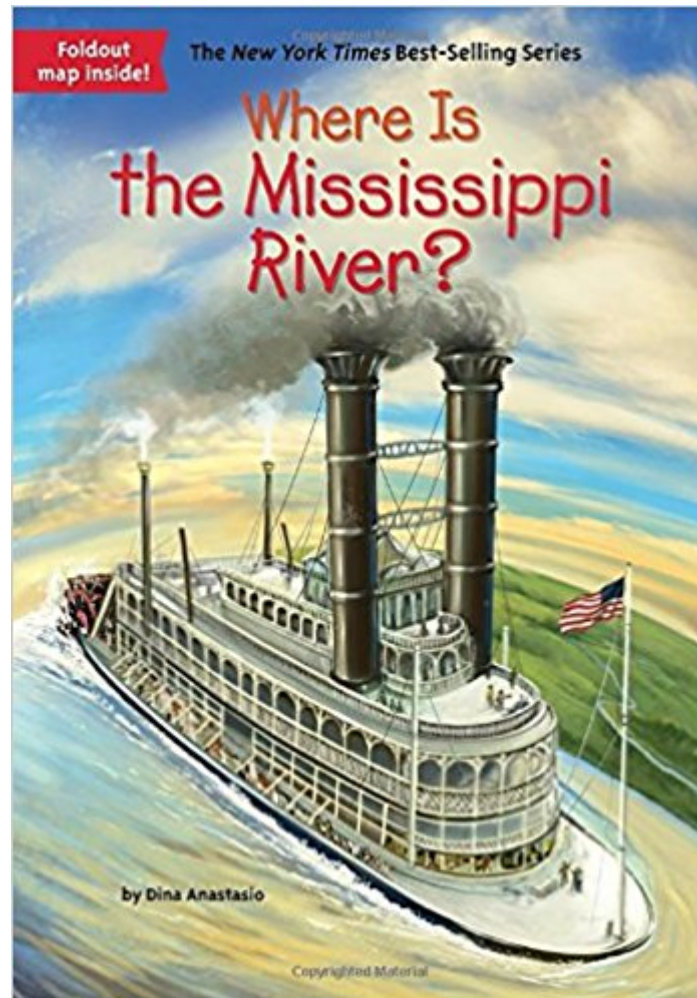




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Where Is The Mississippi River?



Synopsis

Discover the history and culture of one of the most famous waterways in the world: the mighty Mississippi! The most famous river in America runs like a spine between the eastern and western parts of the country, flowing through ten states before it empties into the Gulf of Mexico. The mighty Miss also flows through the history of America, giving rise to great stories about the people who lived on it and used it as a watery highway, from Native Americans and European explorers to skillful riverboat captains and colorful gamblers traveling on luxurious steamboats. And of course it was the first truly American writer, Mark Twain, who grew up along its banks and made the Mississippi River famous around the world. This book, part of the *Where Is?* New York Times best-selling series, is enhanced by eighty illustrations and a detachable fold-out map complete with four photographs on the back.

Book Information

Series: *Where Is?*

Paperback: 112 pages

Publisher: Penguin Workshop (September 12, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0515158240

ISBN-13: 978-0515158243

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 0.3 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: Be the first to review this item

Best Sellers Rank: #66,577 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in *Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Science Studies > Nature > Oceans & Seas* #31 in *Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Science Studies > Nature > Water* #273 in *Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States*

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

Dina Anastasio is the author of *Where Is the Super Bowl?*, *Who Was Steve Irwin?*, and many other books.

Where Is the Mississippi River? On July 4, 2002, a forty-seven-year-old man named Martin

Strel took a swim in a small lake—Lake Itasca—in northern Minnesota. Lake Itasca is where the Mississippi River begins. It is the top of the river, which ends 2,350 miles farther south in the Gulf of Mexico.

Martin Strel had always loved being in the water. As a child in the Central European country of Slovenia, he had spent most of his time swimming in streams and lakes and rivers. When he wasn't swimming, he spent his time reading. He loved to read about rivers. He was fascinated by faraway rivers like the Danube in Europe, the Yangtze in China, the Amazon in South America, and the Mississippi River in the United States.

One of his favorite books was called *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain. It was about a boy growing up beside the Mississippi River in Missouri. Huckleberry Finn takes a trip down the river on a raft. Someday I will swim in that river, Martin Strel thought.

Martin Strel never forgot his dream. Someday he would swim the entire length of the world's great rivers, from the top to the bottom. Martin kept training. In the year 2000, he swam the Danube River, through ten European countries. One thousand eight hundred sixty-six miles in fifty-eight days. No one had ever swum so far in such a short time.

After that, Martin was determined to swim the Mississippi. No one had ever done that before, either. Martin learned all he could about the river. Like all rivers, the Mississippi twists and turns and shifts and changes as it flows south, so it is hard to pinpoint its exact length, but Martin knew he would be swimming about 2,350 miles. He was hoping to swim from five to twelve hours a day.

Martin began his swim at noon on July 4, 2002. People cheered him on from the banks of the river. He swam through or around in ten states—Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Martin didn't quite finish in as short a time as he had hoped. He swam for sixty-eight days instead of sixty-six.

Today, as Martin Strel swims the world's rivers, he works to help people understand the importance of clean water.

“My target is to see happy fish swimming in the water,” he says.

Chapter 1: The Mighty Mississippi

The Mississippi River is not the longest river in the United States. (The Missouri River is longer.) But it is the most famous and it has played a large and exciting part in United States history. Many Americans think of the Mississippi as dividing the eastern and western halves of the country. They describe it as having three parts—the upper, middle, and lower.

The Upper Mississippi runs from Lake Itasca to Saint Louis, Missouri, where it meets up with the Missouri River. Lake Itasca is 1,475 feet above sea level. That means water flowing from the lake will drop down 1,475 feet by the time it reaches the Gulf of Mexico. Think of a single drop of water moving from the top of the river to the bottom. That drop of water will take about ninety days to complete its journey. (Remember, it took Martin Strel only

sixty-eight days.) Lake Itasca is the narrowest part of the river. Leaving the lake, the river water meanders gently east for about sixty miles, where it passes through another Minnesota lake—Lake Winnibigoshish. (Try saying that three times fast!) At that point, it is about eleven miles wide, the widest part of the river. From there on, the water begins its long drop to the Gulf. Catfish, paddlefish, walleye, carp, bass, and pike swim there. Kayaks and canoes paddle through whirlpools, waterfalls, weeds, and rain along streams and lakes too shallow for the barges and steamboats that work the river farther south. In the busy Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, the river becomes deeper. Larger boats carry people and goods south, past small towns and acres of farmland. The Missouri River drains into the Mississippi from the west, just north of Saint Louis, Missouri. The Middle Mississippi runs from Saint Louis to Cairo, Illinois, past lush farmland and small towns. This stretch is not long—only 190 miles—and doesn't twist and turn. In Cairo, the Ohio River drains in from the east and the Lower Mississippi begins. This part of the river runs from Cairo to the Gulf of Mexico. One thousand miles. It flows past Memphis, Tennessee; Natchez, Mississippi; and New Orleans, Louisiana. South of New Orleans, the Mississippi continues for another one hundred miles. This is a vast area of shifting wetlands called the Mississippi River delta. The delta has been forming for about seven thousand years as mud, sand, rocks, and dirt spill from the river. Thirteen thousand square miles of rich, fertile forests, marshes, swamps, islands, and open water. Fresh water and saltwater come together here. Migrating birds stop here. Endangered species like Louisiana black bears and green sea turtles struggle to survive here. Shrimp, oysters, tuna, and other fish live here. Cattails, spider lilies, and other plants thrive. Alligators slide in and out of the water. Many people live in this area as well. Finally, after more than two thousand miles, the Mississippi River reaches the Gulf of Mexico and comes to an end.

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