

# Historic Riverboats

**Activity Overview:** Although Iowa is a landlocked state, it still has a long history of relying on rivers and river boats for travel and trade. In this activity, young historians will learn about the four riverboats in Iowa that are National Historic Landmarks, design and create origami paper boats and test their seaworthiness.

## Connection to Iowa History

With two major rivers on either side of the state, the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, Iowa has relied on river traffic since before the area became a territory. Of the 27 National Historic Landmarks in Iowa, four are riverboats. These sites are locations where political, military, cultural or social history has been saved and preserved. The four boats are the George M. Verity Riverboat, the Lone Star Steamer, Sgt. Floyd Towboat and the William M. Black Steam Dredge.

### George M. Verity Riverboat

The [George M. Verity Riverboat](#) was built in 1927 and originally set sail under the name Samuel S. Thorpe. The boat's first voyage was called the "revival of river traffic" by the *Daily Date* newspaper in Keokuk, Iowa. For 13 years, it shipped items on the Mississippi River for the federal government.

### Lone Star Steamer

The [Lone Star Steamer](#) was built in Lyon, Iowa, in 1868, and would be in service for 99 years. On April 15, 1895, the Lone Star became the first boat to commercially tow in the Hennepin Canal, which is located between the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

### Sergeant Floyd Towboat

Named after Sergeant Charles Floyd, the only death on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, the [Sergeant Floyd Towboat](#) was built in 1932 for the Army Corps of Engineers. It would remain in service until 1975. The boat was left in St. Louis, Missouri, until 1983 when it was purchased by the Sioux City government. It is now a museum.

### William Black Dredge

Built in 1934, the [William M. Black Steam Dredge](#) was originally used by the Army Corps of Engineers. It was used to clear the bottom of the Mississippi River of obstacles that would make river navigation more difficult. This ship is notable because it was among the last steam-powered dredges created and still used paddle wheels for propulsion.



## Instructions ([Video Instructions Available](#))

- 1 **Fold.** Take a piece of paper and fold it in half, lengthwise. Press down the fold and open it up again. View instruction images [here](#).
- 2 **Fold, again.** Next, fold the paper in half, widthwise. Press down the fold. Keep it folded.
- 3 **Rotate.** Keep the paper flat on a surface and rotate the paper to have the fold at the top.

*Instructions continued on next page*

## Materials

- Piece of paper
- Coins, pebbles or something small to weigh down the boat

# River Boats

## Instructions continued

- 4 **Fold down.** Take each of the top corners of the rectangle and fold them both downward toward the center. The edges should line up with the center fold.
- 5 **Fold up.** After the last fold, take one layer of the bottom flap and fold it upwards. Press down firmly.
- 6 **Flip over.** Flip the folded paper over and there should be two little flaps behind the triangle shape. Fold those flaps over the triangle shape.
- 7 **Fold up.** The same as the other side, take one layer of the bottom flap and fold it upwards. Press firmly down.
- 8 **Open.** Insert your thumbs into the opening at the bottom of the folded paper. Slowly pull your thumbs apart in opposite directions. The paper should become a diamond shape.
- 9 **Pull.** Pick up the folded paper. Carefully pull apart the two sides of the folded paper at the top point.
- 10 **Ready to sail.** Once the sides are pulled down, it should resemble a boat shape. It is now ready for testing.
- 11 **Test.** Test your paper boat to see if it can float. Place the boat in water and slowly add either coins or small stones to the boat. How many can your boat hold before sinking?
- 12 **Share!** If you would like to share your boat with the State Historical Museum of Iowa, please email your design to [museum.education@iowa.gov](mailto:museum.education@iowa.gov). We want to share your creation with other young historians!
- 13 **Questions to Spark Learning**
  - Why do you think people used the rivers instead of railroads to transport things?
  - Brainstorm reasons why river transportation was so important to Iowa.
  - Why do you think early cities and towns in Iowa were built along rivers?
- 14 **Additional Resources**

Explore these resources below to learn more about historic river boats in Iowa.

  - [The Goldfinch - Rivers in Iowa](#)
  - [Travel Iowa - George M. Verity Riverboat Museum](#)
  - [Sioux City Museum - Sgt. Floyd Towboat](#)
  - [Dubuque County Historical - William Black Dredge](#)
  - [Buffalo Bill Museum - Lone Star Steamer](#)

# Steps to Create a Paper Boat

## Step 1

Take a piece of paper and fold it in half, lengthwise. Press down the fold and open it up again.



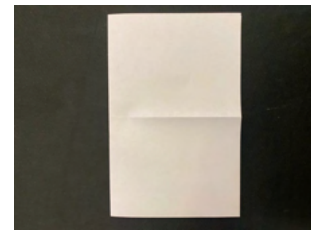
## Step 2

Fold the paper in half, widthwise. Press down the fold. Keep it folded.



## Step 3

Keep the paper flat on a surface and rotate the paper to have the fold at the top.



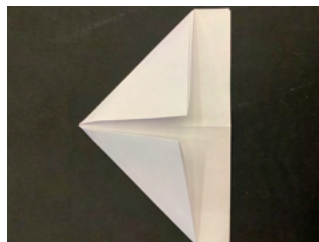
## Step 4

Take each of the top corners of the rectangle and fold them both downward toward the center. The edges should line up with the center fold.



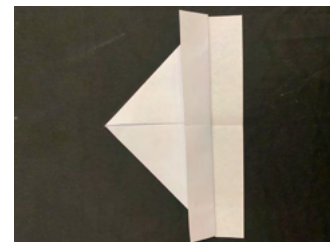
## Step 5

After the last fold, take one layer of the bottom flap and fold it upwards. Press down firmly.



## Step 6

Flip the folded paper over and there should be two little flaps behind the triangle shape. Fold those flaps over the triangle shape.



## Step 7

The same as the other side, take one layer of the bottom flap and fold it upwards. Press firmly down.



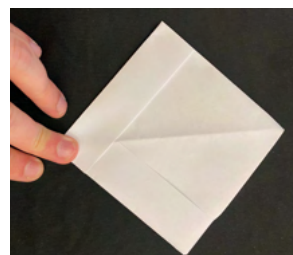
## Step 8

Insert your thumbs into the opening at the bottom of the folded paper. Slowly pull your thumbs apart in opposite directions. The paper should become a boat shape.



## Step 9

Pick up the folded paper. Carefully pull apart the two sides of the folded paper at the top point.



## Step 10

Once the sides are pulled down, it should resemble a boat shape. It is now ready for testing.

