



Marcus Center Riverwalk

Elementary Curriculum

Our Milwaukee River is one of great importance to the geography and the livelihood of Milwaukee.

At our earliest times, the Milwaukee River was as necessary as air for the First Peoples of Wisconsin. It was necessary for transportation, for liquid nourishment, and for their food. They treated the Milwaukee River like they did their land, with deep respect and honor, not just something to be used and dismissed.

Until the 1830's when the eastern European settlers came, the river was as pure as it had been for centuries. The pure water source was one of the greatest assets of Milwaukee. It was one of the many reasons why people were drawn to set down roots here. Water meant survival not only for food, drinking, and transportation, but soon also for industry and jobs.

In the 1840's, with the early settlements solidified into a full-fledged City of Milwaukee-with a rising population of about 20,000, and before effective sewer systems were in place, the Milwaukee River was a "catch-all" of all sorts of waste- human, animal, and industry. As Milwaukee grew, so did the types of businesses. Breweries, meat packing and tanning, just to name a few, used the water for their power, but also for their disposal. With the rise of the population, usually doubling every 10 years, it was not until after the Civil War (1861-65) that the population could not ignore the situation they had created any longer. The city struggled with the know-how, the cost, and interest for many decades. There were many successful attempts in creating sewer systems, but some became obsolete with the swells of population, increase of industry, and rainwater.

By 1980, with over 630,000 Milwaukee citizens, the Federal Courts mandated that the city improve the sewage treatment, which included flushing out the Milwaukee River. Because of this, two mayors of Milwaukee, Mayor Henry Maier and Mayor John Norquist, stewarded the idea of the Riverwalk. While cleaning up the river, they also saw the economic benefits of our long forgotten natural asset, a clean river.

Working together with businesses they developed a Riverwalk system that currently runs through three neighborhoods- Downtown, The Historic Third Ward, and the Beerline. Looking at the Riverwalk in front of you, notice the determined effort to include artists from around Milwaukee in its landscape. You can see children's tiles along the walk, seating areas, and

sculptures distributed along both sides of the Riverwalk that make you look up and around you. The art helps the visitor see the future and appreciate the past.

Through lots of hard work and determination, today we can see the beautiful effects of having a clean river running through our central downtown. We can see animals thriving, recreation, art, and gathering spaces for the downtown employees and visitors.

Here are some additional things to think about:

1. How do you see the Milwaukee River being used?
2. Do you see any animals – fish or fowl (birds) in the river?
3. What does the Milwaukee River flow into?
4. There are three main rivers in Milwaukee. One of them is the Milwaukee River. Can you name the other two?



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5. What direction is the water flowing?
 6. Which sculpture is your favorite?

Here are some additional resources for you to use to further explore the Milwaukee River and the Riverwalk.

<https://www.milwaukeekeeper.org/milwaukee-river-basin/>

<https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/milwaukee-river/>

<https://milwaukeeiverwalkdistrict.com/river-sculpture>

<https://www.visitmilwaukee.org/articles/things-to-do/riverwalk>

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=milwaukee+riverwalk&docid=608030093574211085&mid=D467608530B70C980F8CD467608530B70C980F8C&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

