

Songs about Rivers

“Old Folks at Home”
1851, Stephen Foster

“Way down upon the
Swanee River,
Far, far away
There’s where my heart
is turning ever
There’s where the old folks stay
All up and down the
whole creation,
Sadly I roam
Still longing for the
old plantation
And for the old folks at home.”

“Oh Shenandoah”
1800s

“Oh Shenandoah,
I long to hear you,
Away you rolling river,
Oh Shenandoah,
I long to hear you,
Away, I’m bound away
’Cross the wide Missouri.
Oh Shenandoah,
I love your daughter,
Away you rolling river,
I’ll take her ’cross
Your rollin’ water,
Away, I’m bound away
’Cross the wide Missouri.”

“Low Bridge”
1905 by Thomas Allen

“I’ve got a mule
and her name is Sal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
She’s a good old worker
and a good old pal
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal
We’ve hauled some barges
in our day
Filled with lumber, coal,
and hay
And every inch
of the way we know
From Albany to Buffalo.”

Check for Understanding

Read and answer the questions below.

1. Who does the author miss in “Old Folks at Home?” _____
2. What river is mentioned in “Old Folks at Home?” _____
3. What river is mentioned in “Oh Shenandoah?” _____
4. What waterway is mentioned in “Low Bridge?” _____
5. Who is the author’s work buddy in “Low Bridge?” _____
6. Do you think the river flows fast or slow in the song, “Oh Shenandoah?” _____

Extend Your Thinking

Which song do you think is the happiest and why? _____



Did You Know?

Since rivers were so important to a civilization, the river often influenced the culture of a civilization. In fact, early historical records indicate that people worshiped rivers, wrote about rivers, and sang about rivers. In the United States rivers are still an important part of our culture.