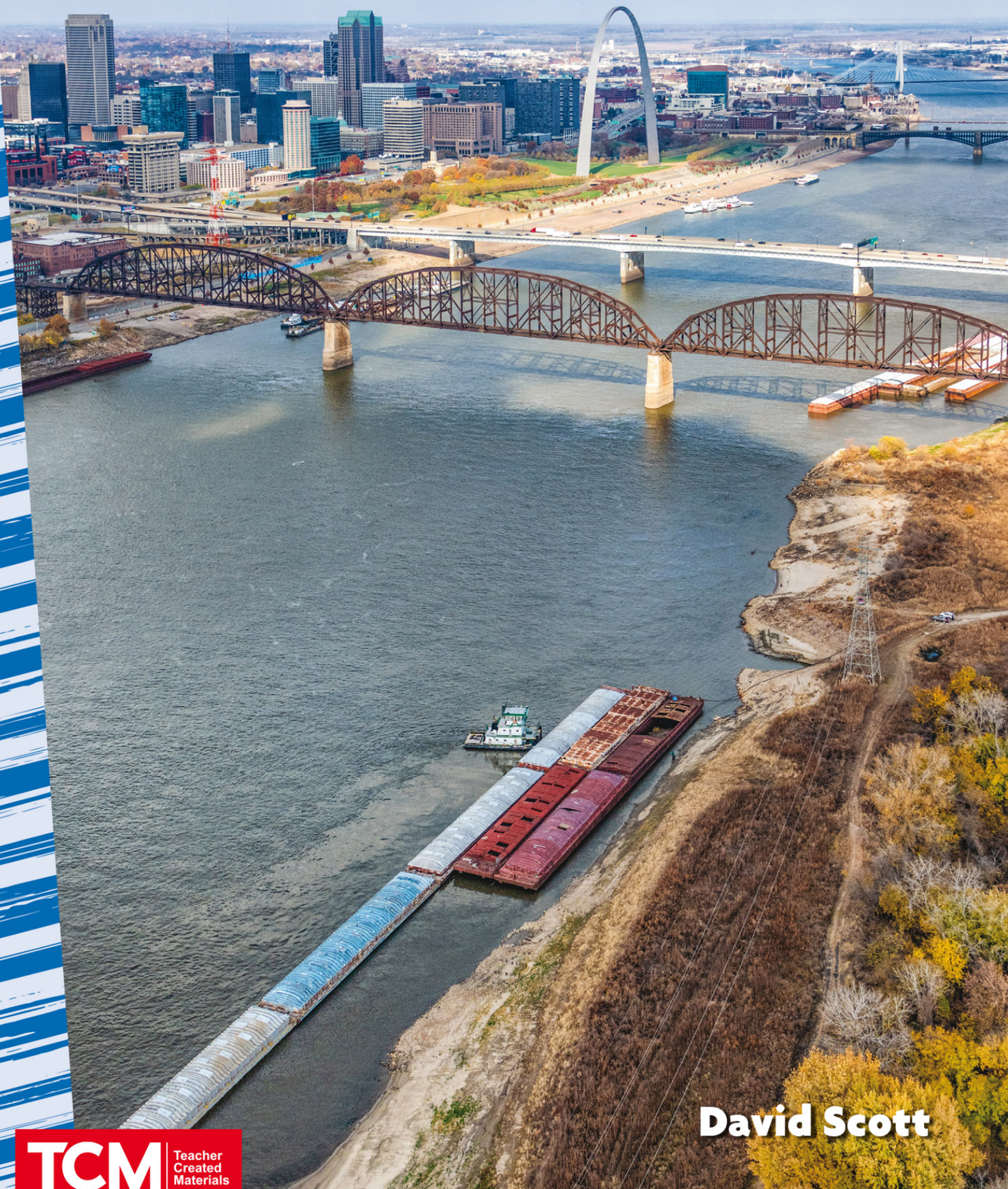


The **Mississippi** and Other U.S. Waterways



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**Shown on the cover is St. Louis, Missouri, on
the banks of the Mississippi River.**

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Big River

The name the Ojibwe peoples gave the Mississippi River means “Big River” or “Father of Waters.” But the river’s source is actually very small.

It all begins at Lake Itasca in Minnesota. The source of a river is called its **headwater**. Here, the Mississippi River is around 20 feet (7 meters) wide and 3 feet (1 meter) deep. At the source, its average speed is about half as fast as people walk. It would be easy to walk across. It is a slow river, too.

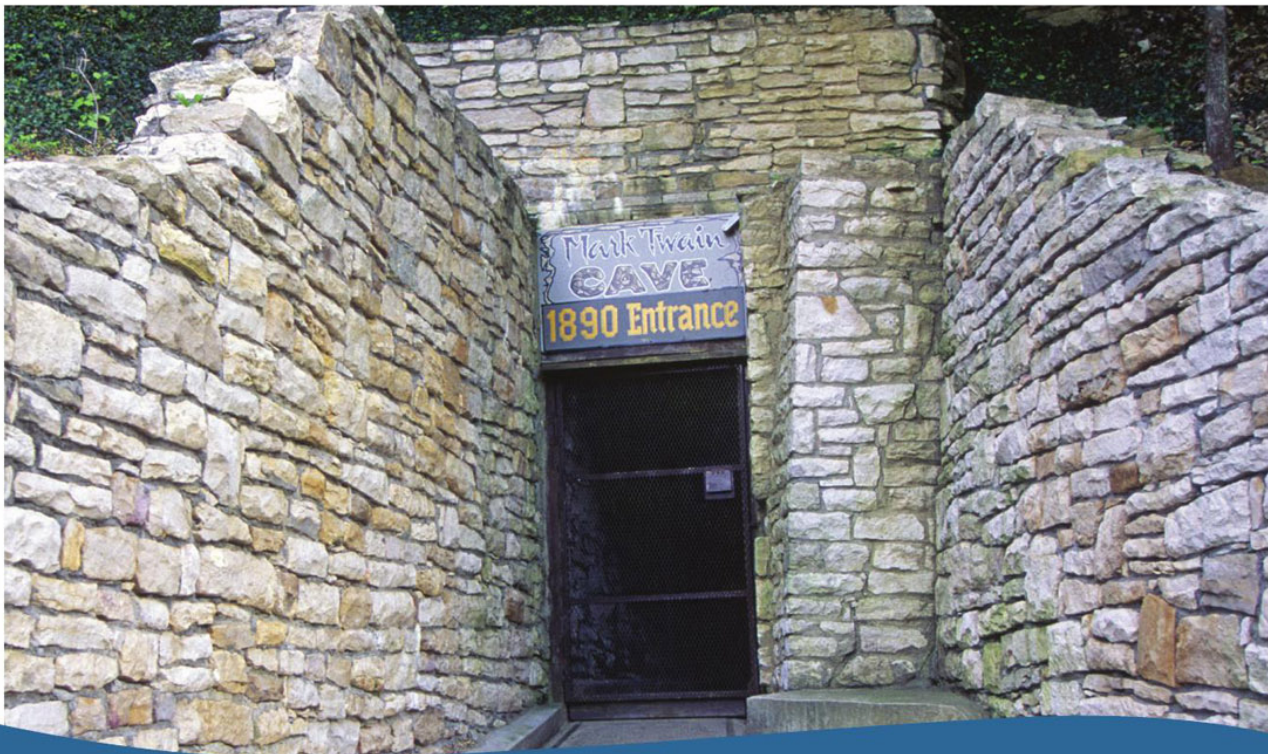
In Minnesota, the river begins a 2,340-mile (3,766-kilometer) journey south. On its way, it passes through 10 states. Water from 31 different states flows into it. The size of the river grows bigger as it flows. The average depth and width of the river changes depending on which section you’re in.

The river passes **fertile** farmland. Many of the crops that feed the United States are grown here. Cargo ships travel up and down some parts of the river every day. It is a busy and important **waterway**.

The history of the Mississippi River is the history of the United States. People have **prospered** along its riverbanks. Cities have grown there. The river is part of the borders of ten states. It provides food, water, and transportation today. And its story began long, long ago.

the Mississippi River along New Orleans, 1880





Mark Twain Cave

Mark Twain famously wrote about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn on the Mississippi River. His books were based on his childhood in Hannibal, Missouri. Even the cave in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is real. The author's signature was found inside the cave.

River Before Time

Seventy million years ago, dinosaurs ruled the planet. The world was very different then. In fact, the continents and land masses were still forming into what they are now.

In the East, the Appalachian Mountains formed between 300 and 500 million years ago. In the West, the Rocky Mountains were formed 80 million years ago. Rainfall and melting snow flowed down from these mountain ranges and into the Mississippi Valley. The Mississippi River was born.

The Mississippi River was much smaller then. But that would change over time.



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