



**Canal &  
River Trust**

Making life better by water



**Explorers**

# **Soulbury Three Locks on the Grand Union Canal**

**Teacher guidance notes**



## Overview of the pack

Introduction to Soulbury Three Locks in Buckinghamshire, with a focus on canals in the past and how to visit and enjoy them safely now.

## Key Stage 2 National Curriculum links

- **Geography**
  - describe and understand key aspects of human geography including types of settlement and land use, economic activity and distribution of natural resources.
- **History**
  - Events beyond living memory which are significant nationally or globally and contrast changes over time.
  - Local Study
- **PSHE**
  - Water safety relates to: Understanding risk; Knowledge and skills to make informed decisions; Learn rules and ways of keeping safe; Differentiate between risk, hazard and danger; Recognize, predict and assess risks in different situations
- Links with English, Maths & Science.

## Other resources

- Canal & River Explorers' Water Safety Activity Pack  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/library/31120.pdf>
- Canal & River Explorers' Travel and Transport pack  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/media/library/31112.pdf>

## Learning objectives

- Gain local knowledge of Soulbury Three Locks history and current leisure uses
- Understand the role of waterways as transport networks in the past.
- Develop an understanding of risk and hazards by waterways and how to visit safely

## Success criteria

- All will increase their knowledge about the importance of canals in the past and how to visit safely now. They will have worked in pairs and groups.
- Most will understand how the development of canals affected people & goods and will understand why canals developed.
- Some will be able to explain this accurately and in detail to others.

## Prior learning

- Explore the Explore our Waterway Past and Water Safety posters on the Canal & River Explorers' website  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers/resources?keyword=&formats%5B%5D=Posters>
- Identify local waterways and other transport networks on a Google map of your area.

## Follow up

- Writing creatively based on a canal family's daily life using the photo on Slide 16
- Use the Canal & Rivers Trust archive for your own research (you can download low res images) <http://collections.canalrivertrust.org.uk/home>
- Field trip to your local canal, locks and pumphouse at Soulbury Three Locks, near Great Brickhill. How to book: use Planning your visit section of Canal & Rivers Trust website, with generic risk assessment and tips:  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers/planning-your-visit>

## Additional teacher information and discussion points on each slide to help you:

### Slide 1 – Title Slide

### Slide 2 – The Grand Union Canal – then & now (3 mins Intro)

- Children may know the place on the slide by different names: Soulbury, or Three Locks, or Stoke Hammond
- Full address of the site is: Three Locks, Leighton Rd, Stoke Hammond, Milton Keynes MK17 9DD

### Slide 3 – Key words

- Print out for a wall or table display as a reminder to learners while they work.  
Key words – canal, river, navvy, spade, shovel, wheel-barrow, pick-axe, cargo, toll-keeper, gauge, toll, bargemen, bonnet, cap, pump-house, lock

### Slide 4 – What is a canal?

- Image is of Soulbury 3 Locks from the south (Leighton Buzzard), looking towards the 3 Locks pub and lock-keeper's cottage in the direction of Fenny Stratford.
- Sorting activity: print off a selection of images of rivers and canals on separate sheets of paper, 6 per table group. Leave on tables with a post it note for Rivers and another for Canals for sorting.
- Emphasis is on manmade nature of canals: "I'm looking for something which is always true."
  - Canals were made by people. They have steep, straight sides.
  - Rivers are natural. They can bend and change with the seasons and their edges are uneven.

### Slides 5 & 6

- These slides are included to reinforce the learning on canal or river if needed
- No need to spend much time, this is intended as a recap of the group work only.

## Slide 7 & 8 – When was the canal built?

- Canals were built around 200 years ago, before railways were invented (which was 1850s)
- Timeline activity: needs a ribbon or string of 3 – 4 metres and print off 4 cards from Lesson Resources Pack, each with a date in large numbers: 2019, 1939, 1837, 1797 and a picture on the back to represent each time period
- Select 4 children, who stand facing the class and holding a card each, out of order for rest of class to sort them into reverse order of date: 2019, 1939, 1837, 1797
- Teacher joins them from 2019 in reverse date order, using the ribbon, passing it to each child to hold and forming a visual timeline. Use a few words such as, “wind back time....wind back time..” to show we are going backwards.

## Slide 9

- The image shows a scene from the opening of the first section of the Grand Union canal in London in 1801
- Draw parallels with recent major openings of engineering or space projects eg. a new bridge or road in the local area, or recent sporting international events eg. Olympics, London Marathon

## Slide 10 – How did they build the canal?

- Children may be unfamiliar with pre-machinery construction methods but more familiar with digging holes in the sand at the beach, or gardening using spades, buckets or wheelbarrows so comparisons may be useful here.
- Use role play to give them clues about the hand tools used in the past.

## Slide 11 – Navvies

- Men who dug the canals were called Navigators (Navvies for short).
- Many worked extremely long hours and it was very dangerous, with no health & safety controls
- Many were Irish or Scots in origin and stayed away from their families, as there was very little reliable work at home for them. Some later brought their families to England to live.

## Slide 12 & 13 – Where does the canal go?

- You may prefer to add in your own school location onto the map, or to use google maps here to find the canal
- Counties that the canal goes through include: Herts, Bucks, Northants and into the midlands
- In this Bucks/ Beds. Border area, the canal was a major feature in the rural landscape and much farm produce was transported to get a better price at market in the towns to the north and south to London

## Slide 14 – Why did they build a canal?

- Key point is that goods could be carried more smoothly and faster, with larger loads: “Canals were to transport cargo – this means heavy things for people to trade and sell.”
- Prep for activity: bring in items such as a stone, piece of pottery, lump of charcoal

## Slide 15 – Cargo

- Prep for activity: bring in a tray of gravel, some loose tea, small wooden plank, fine china.

## Slide 16 – Who worked on the canal?

- Key points here are that not only men worked on the canals, although to begin with, this was true.
- As the 19th century progressed, the replacement of rural jobs with machinery, and urban poverty and poor housing meant that whole families joined them on the barges, all working the boats and providing free labour.

## Slide 17 – Gauging a boat – the tollkeeper

- A practical science/maths activity can be added as a follow up activity: to use a measuring stick to “gauge” some toy boats with different weight loads. Measurement needs to be consistently from the edge of the boat down to water level as in the diagram.

## Slide 18 – A boat family in 1913

- Extension or follow up work in creative writing can be developed using this image as a starting point.

## Slide 19 – Horse power

- You could introduce some music or poetry activities in response to the image eg. songs about horses (Horsey, horsey to a regular rhythm of the horse walking along)

## Slide 20 – Now: Soulbury 3 Locks today & Slide 21

## The Grand Union canal then & now (reminder)

## Slide 22 – Visiting Soulbury 3 Locks

- encourage children to look closely at the image of the map as there are a lot of details included in “What to see”
- Explain unfamiliar terms: lock, pumphouse

The pumphouse at Soulbury is an important historic building first built in 1838 to house a steam engine. It was later extended to create two buildings side-by-side. The building became Grade II listed in 1984. It was renovated in 2019.

The pumphouse now contains an electric pump which plays a vital role in keeping the Grand Union Canal open and is one of a series located along the canal. Without these pumps, the canal would run out of water during the busy summer boating season.

When a boat passes down a lock it takes a lot of water downstream with it. Unless that water is replaced the canal would eventually dry out. When the Grand Junction Canal, which would later become the Grand Union, opened in 1800 a series of reservoirs were built to collect water from streams and rivers. These reservoirs were used to keep the water levels high enough for boats to stay afloat. But if there were a lot of boats using the locks, or there was a drought, these water supplies could dry up and traffic would be brought to a standstill.

## Slide 23 – Now... What can we do there?

- The images are recent, of the newly restored pumphouse on the left and the pub, The 3 Locks on the right with family activities.

## Slide 24 – Things to do by the canal

- Family trail can be downloaded at: [www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers)  
This can also be used as a worksheet on a school visit for KS2
- Mobile/tablet app can be downloaded at [www.mktrails.org](http://www.mktrails.org)

## Slide 25 – Can you spot the dangers?

- Sheet is from the Danger Ranger section of Canal & Rivers Trust Water Safety Pack mentioned (see Other Resources above).
- This activity can be done at the board by bringing a few children up to point out hazards and say what they should be doing instead.
- print off the sheet to use as an in-class activity if necessary, 1 per pair, they can circle each hazard.

## Slide 26 – Water safety tips

- from Slide 17 of Canal & Rivers Trust Water Safety Pack (see Other resources above)
- This can be left as a follow up activity or a homework as they can share this with parents/carers, which is helpful in getting across the safety message to all adults too.
- Can be done as a class with Post it notes for ideas, stuck onto board and read out by teacher.

## Slide 27 – Staying safe by the water

- SAFE slogan means “Stay Away From the Edge”!
- Children can hold up the 4 posters from Lesson Resources pack, with a letter each and sort themselves into the correct order to spell out SAFE – leave the posters pinned up on board in classroom as a reminder.

## Follow up activities

- Investigate how canals are used today. Leisure activities including canoeing, fishing, walking on the towpaths, bird spotting etc. This could be initiated by a visit to a local site near your school.
- Learn more about construction of canals. Use the Canal & River Explorers' Build A Canal interactive game online  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers/games/build-a-canal>
- Writing creatively based on a canal family's daily life using the photo on Slide 16
- Use the Canal & Rivers Trust archive for your own research (you can download low res images) <http://collections.canalrivertrust.org.uk/home>
- A field trip to your local canal, locks and pumphouse at Soulbury Three Locks, near Great Brickhill. How to book: use Planning your visit section of Canal & Rivers Trust website, with generic risk assessment and tips:  
<https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers/planning-your-visit>