

Abraham Lincoln, the Inventor

Abe leaned over the steamboat. “Not again. We’re caught on a sandbar. This happens too often.”

Abe and his friend Sam watched as the crew unloaded the cargo, piece by piece.

“Well, we might as well sit down. This will take a while,” said Sam. “Too bad we have to travel so much.”

Abe shook his head. “I’ll sit, but while I’m sitting I’m going to figure out something to stop these boats from getting stuck in shallow water or on sandbars.”

Abe took out his pad and started writing notes and drawing sketches. He’d scratch one note out and write another. Then he’d make more drawings.

Sam tried to look at what Abe was doing, but Abe wouldn’t let him see.

“What are you doing, there Lincoln,” said Sam. “So, being a Congressman for Illinois isn’t enough. Now you want to be an inventor too?”

“You’ll see. I’ll create something to keep these boats afloat or my name isn’t Abe Lincoln. Think of all the time we have to waste when we’re stuck like this.”

Sam stood up, still trying to see Abe’s notes. “So, what’s your idea?” He stuck his hands in his waistcoat pockets.

“Okay,” said Abe. “Look here.” He showed Sam a drawing of a boat with bellows, or air bags, on the sides.

“If there were some kind of bellows on the sides of the boat, they would make the boat lighter and keep it afloat in shallow water. The thing though is to figure out how to inflate the bellows when needed.”

Sam studied the drawing. “That’s a grand idea, Abe. And with your curiosity of mechanical things, I know you’ll find a solution.”

Hours passed as the crew unloaded the steamboat. They pushed it passed the sandbar, then reloaded the cargo.

When they were just about to move again, Abe jumped up. “I’ve got it. It’ll need ropes and pulleys to inflate the bellows so the boat will be lifted up.”

Sam patted Abe’s back. “I knew you’d figure it out.”

When Abe arrived back home in Springfield, he sought the help of a mechanic. Abe drew up plans and

helped the mechanic create a model of the invention.

After getting everything ready, Abe went to the patent office of Mr. Robbins.

“Sir,” said Abe. “I have here a model of a steamboat with inflatable bellows. The bellows, when inflated, will make the boat light enough to pass over shallow water. They will also make it easier to pass over sandbars. I need your help to file for a patent.”

Mr. Robbins examined the boat and the accompanying notes. “Very well.”

The next day Mr. Robbins filed the application. A month later, Abe received his patent.

Abe rushed over to Sam’s house. “I’ve got it! I’ve got! Now I can get started on getting my invention manufactured. By next year, we can travel by steamboat without worrying about sandbars or shallow waters!”

Questions

1. What are bellows?
2. What did the crew have to do to make the boat light enough to pass over the sandbar?
3. Why did Sam believe Abe could invent something?
4. What did Abe invent?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. Shallow
2. Afloat
3. Inflate
4. Grand
5. Cargo
6. Examined
7. Manufactured

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) “Abe shook his head. “I’ll sit, but while I’m sitting I’m going to figure out something to stop these boats from getting stuck in **shallow** water or on sandbars.””

- a. deep b. not deep c. cold c. rough

2) “You’ll see. I’ll create something to keep these boats **afloat** or my name isn’t Abe Lincoln. Think of all the time we have to waste when we’re stuck like this.”

- a. above water b. in water c. below water d. on land

3) “...The thing though is to figure out how to **inflate** the bellows when needed.”

- a. fill with water b. fill with air c. inhale d. deflate

4) “Sam studied the drawing. “That’s a **grand** idea, Abe. And with your curiosity of mechanical things, I know you’ll find a solution.”

- a. silly b. fun c. great d. small

5) “Hours passed as the crew unloaded the steamboat. They pushed it passed the sandbar, then reloaded the **cargo**.”

- a. goods and packages b. bellows c. passengers d. sand and shells

6) “Mr. Robbins **examined** the boat and the accompanying notes.”

- a. fixed b. cleaned c. outlined d. studied

7) “Abe rushed over to Sam’s house. “I’ve got it! I’ve got it! Now I can get started on getting my invention **manufactured!**”

- a. approved b. made in a factory c. digitized d. patented