

## His First Dollar

Source: Public Domain/Gutenberg

## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Historical Fiction

After he became President, Lincoln told his Secretary of State the following story of the first dollar he ever had for his own:

Seward, he said, did you ever hear how I earned my first dollar? No, replied Seward. Well, I was about eighteen years of age . . . and had constructed a flatboat. . . . A **steamer** was going down the river. We have, you know, no wharves on the western streams, and the custom was, if passengers were at any of the landings they had to go out in a boat, the **steamer** stopping and taking them on board. I was **contemplating** my new boat, and wondering whether I could make it stronger or improve it in any part, when two men with trunks came down to the shore in carriages, and looking at the different boats, singled out mine, and asked: 'Who owns this?'

I answered modestly, 'I do.'

'Will you,' said one of them, 'take us and our trunks out to the **steamer**?''

'Certainly,' said I. I was very glad to have a chance of earning something, and supposed that they would give me a couple of **bits**.' The trunks were put in my boat, the passengers seated themselves on them, and I **sculled** them out to the **steamer**. They got on board, and I lifted the trunks and put them on deck. The **steamer** was moving away when I called out:

'You have forgotten to pay me.'

Each of them took from his pocket a silver half-dollar and threw it on the bottom of my boat. I could scarcely believe my eyes as I picked up the money. You may think it was a very little thing, and in these days it seems to me like a trifle, but it was a most important **incident** in my life at that time. I could scarcely credit that I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar in less than a day—that by honest work I had earned a dollar. I was a more hopeful and thoughtful boy from that time.

## Infer Meaning of Word from Context – Historical Fiction

Questions developed for Chicago Public Schools by CUE, 2009.

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What does **steamer** mean in the passage?

- a. something hot
- b. a large boat
- c. a trunk
- d. a river

3. What does **bits** mean in the passage?

- a. money
- b. presents
- c. small
- d. trunks

2. What does **contemplating** mean in the passage?

- a. admiring
- b. wondering
- c. thinking about
- d. looking at

4. What does **sculled** mean in the passage?

- a. seated
- b. credit
- c. passenger
- d. moved

5. Write your own answer to this question. What does **incident** mean in the passage?

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### TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

**Answers:** You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	b	c	a	d

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.  
Event or thing that happened.