First Grade

DISCOVER AMERICA

Teacher Guide



Robert Fulton's Steamboat

LITTLEPATRIOTS

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Table of

Contents

3	Themes & Values
	Learning Objectives
4	Key Terms
5	Introduction
7	Lesson
12	Assessment: Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down
	Review
13	Activity: Build Your Own Steamboat
15	Resources
17	Images
28	Notes

Key Themes

- Creative freedom
- Community
- Experimentation

Core Values

- Community
- Liberty



Learning Objectives

Students will be able to

- Define and explain transportation, inventor, innovator, and perseverance.
- Describe how Robert Fulton's steamboat improved transportation and helped communities send goods and travel more easily.
- Give examples of how Fulton showed perseverance when solving a tricky problem, and relate it to times they have kept trying.
- Explain why Fulton's steamboat was important in American history and how it helped America grow.
- Brainstorm or share ideas for improving something they use every day, showing how they can be innovators like Fulton.

Key Terms

01 **canal:** a man-made waterway used to help boats travel from one place to another.

02 **community:** a group living in an area with similar interests, beliefs, attitudes, and goals.

03 **engineering:** figuring out how to design and build useful machines, tools, and structures.

04 **innovator:** someone who takes an existing idea or invention and makes it better, easier to use, or safer.

05 **inventor:** someone who thinks of a brand-new idea or makes something that has never been made before, usually to solve a problem.

06 **perseverance:** to keep going and to continue to try, even when something is hard, tricky, or frustrating, until you reach your goal or complete your idea.

07 **steamboat:** a boat that moves using steam power instead of oars or sails.

08 **submarine:** a special type of boat that can travel underwater.

09 **transportation:** moving people or things from one place to another, like carrying food, supplies, or even passengers on a river, road, or train.

10 **visionary:** a person who creatively thinks about the future.

11 **voyage:** a trip from one place to another.

Introduction

TELL Students 📷

Hello, Little Patriots! Have you ever been in a lake, pool, or the ocean and felt the water moving really fast? How hard was it to swim or move against the water? That rushing water is called a current, and it can push you in one direction. A long time ago, a lot of people lived near big rivers like the Mississippi River and the Hudson River. **[Reference Mississippi and Hudson River Images]** These rivers were very important because they helped communities send food, supplies, and other goods from one place to another. A **community** is a group living in an area with similar interests, beliefs, attitudes, and goals. **[Reference Community Image]**

ASK Students

What is a community? Why would it be important to be able to move items between communities?

TELL Students 📷🔑

But moving things on rivers wasn't always easy! The strong river current pushed boats in the wrong direction, and people had to row with oars or use sails to try to move upstream. This took a lot of time and effort, and sometimes the food and goods would spoil before reaching the people who needed them. Communities needed a better solution, and that's where a clever man named Robert Fulton came in. **[Reference Robert Fulton Image]** Robert Fulton was an inventor. An **inventor** is someone who thinks of a brand-new idea or makes something that has never been made before, usually to solve a problem. Inventors like Fulton often show something called perseverance. **Perseverance** is when you keep trying and working hard to reach a goal, even when something is very tricky or doesn't work the first time. **[Reference Perseverance Image]** Fulton didn't give up, even when things were really hard, and people thought his ideas were strange.

ASK Students

Why does an inventor need perseverance?

TELL Students 📷🔑

Fulton was also an innovator. An **innovator** is someone who takes an existing idea or invention and makes it better, easier to use, or safer. **[Reference Innovator Image]**

Introduction

TELL Students (continued)

Fulton looked at how people were using boats on rivers and thought, "I can make a better way for boats to move, even against the strong current!" Using a steam engine, he improved the **steamboat**—a boat that moves using steam power instead of oars or sails. **[Reference Steamboat Image]** The steamboat could travel upriver quickly, even against the current!

ASK Students

What is a steamboat?

TELL Students

Because of Fulton's perseverance and creativity, the steamboat changed transportation in America. **Transportation** means moving people or things from one place to another, like carrying food, supplies, or even passengers on a river, road, or train. **[Reference Transportation Image]** Good transportation is important because it helps communities get the things they need, helps people visit friends and family, and allows businesses to send their goods to more places. Fulton's steamboat helped people travel faster, sent food and goods to more communities, and made life along the rivers much easier. His work also shows us something important: when you use your imagination, work hard, and never give up, you can solve big problems and do amazing things—just like Robert Fulton! As we watch a Star Spangled Adventures cartoon about Robert Fulton and his invention, think about these questions:

- Have you ever tried something really tricky that you didn't give up on?
- Can you think of a way to improve something you use every day, like a toy or game?

WATCH

Star Spangled Adventures Ep. 18: Fulton's Steamboat

Lesson

TELL Students 📷

In our Star Spangled Adventures cartoon, we learned about a clever man named Robert Fulton. **[Reference Robert Fulton Image]** In 1807, he lived in New York, and he wanted to solve a difficult problem. Remember, people who lived along rivers needed a way to move things—like food, crops, and goods—up and down the river, but the strong river current made it really hard. At that time, boats needed either oars **[Reference Oar Image]** for rowing or strong winds to fill their sails. Traveling upstream, against the current, was slow, difficult, and sometimes impossible for long distances. Fulton thought, "There has to be a better way!" He wanted to create a boat that could move quickly, even against the strong current, without depending on rowing or wind. **[Reference Rowboat and Sailboat Images]** This was a big challenge, and many people thought it couldn't be done. But Fulton used his imagination, creativity, and most importantly, he persevered. His goal was to make transportation better. Fulton's determination to solve this problem would change transportation forever.

ASK Students

Why do you think transportation—moving people and things from one place to another—is so important? What would you do if you had a tricky problem like Robert Fulton?

TELL Students 📷

Robert Fulton never gave up, even when his ideas didn't work at first. He knew that transportation was very important for communities, helping farmers and factories send food, supplies, and other goods to more places faster. And he wanted to make it easier for people to travel and to send goods and materials to other communities. Before the steamboat, people used sailboats and rowboats to travel on rivers. **[Reference Sailboat and Rowboat Images]** These boats could float easily with the river current, which is the water moving quickly downstream toward the sea, but traveling upriver, against the current, was much harder. Farmers and factories needed a way to send fruits, vegetables, and other goods upriver, but sailboats and rowboats could only go with the current. One choice was a keelboat, which could travel upriver, but it was very slow, and the food and goods were often spoiled before they arrived. **[Reference Keelboat Image]** Fortunately, Robert Fulton was very creative. He loved solving problems, enjoyed making new things, and he persevered.

Lesson

ASK Students

What do you think Fulton did to solve the problem of moving boats upriver against the strong current?

TELL Students

Robert Fulton was born in Pennsylvania and began his creative career as an artist, painting beautiful pictures. **[Reference Artist Image]** He even went to London to study art. But he didn't become as famous as he had hoped in the art world. Fulton was a very creative person who never gave up easily—he showed incredible perseverance. He started to explore other interests, like engineering, and designed **canals**, which are man-made waterways used to help boats travel from one place to another. He even created the first **submarine**, called the *Nautilus*, which is a special type of boat that can travel underwater. **[Reference Nautilus Image]**

ASK Students

What do you think engineering means?

TELL Students

Fulton was both an artist and an inventor, and he also studied **engineering**, which means figuring out how to design and build useful machines, tools, and structures. **[Reference Engineering Image]** He thought like an artist, imagining how things might work and what they could look like if he turned them into real inventions. He could draw his ideas with lines, curves, and colors so that others could see exactly what he imagined. Let's watch a Learn More with Liberty video to learn more.

WATCH

Learn More with Liberty Course Video: Robert Fulton



Lesson

TELL Students

Using this creativity and determination, Fulton worked with a man named Robert Livingston to bring something to America that would change our history forever—a successful steamboat, powered by a steam engine that could move upriver against the current without needing oars or wind. **[Reference Robert Livingston Image]** Even after failing several times, Fulton kept trying, showing that hard work and imagination can solve big problems. Let's watch another Learn More with Liberty video to learn more!

WATCH

Learn More with Liberty: What Is A Steamboat?



TELL Students

Remember, a steamboat is a special kind of boat that moves through the water using a steam engine instead of sails or oars. The steam engine boils water to create steam, which powers the boat's engine and makes it move—even against the river current, something that was very difficult for rowboats and sailboats. **[Reference Steamboat Image]** Steamboats were very important because they made travel and transportation much faster. Farmers and factories could send their crops, goods, and materials upriver to new towns without losing food or supplies, and people could travel more easily along the rivers. Fulton's success with steamboats also helped America grow, because communities along the rivers could trade, travel, and connect with each other much more quickly. Mr. Fulton's talents with steamboats helped him meet many interesting people, including Benjamin Franklin, another inventor and thinker who helped shape America.
[Reference Benjamin Franklin Image]

ASK Students

What do you remember about Benjamin Franklin? What do you think Benjamin Franklin and Robert Fulton had in common?

Lesson

TELL Students 📷

Mr. Fulton had met many important people, including a man named Robert Livingston. **[Reference Robert Livingston Image]** Livingston helped draft the Declaration of Independence and lived near the Hudson River on a beautiful property called Clermont in New York. He agreed to give Fulton the money needed to design and build a successful steam-powered boat, or a steamboat. At first, designing and building the steamboat was very difficult and Fulton faced a lot of challenges. He even failed several times. Even after trying and failing, Fulton didn't give up—he persevered. Many people thought riding a steamboat was dangerous, and some in his community didn't think a big boat could move against the river current. Bravely, Fulton and Livingston believed they could create a safe and fast boat, and they did. They named their first boat *The North River Steamboat*. **[Reference The North River Steamboat]**

ASK Students

What do you think gave Robert Fulton the courage to keep working on his steamboat? What may have happened if Robert Fulton had not persevered?

TELL Students 📷

Robert Fulton didn't give up, and his hard work paid off! On August 17, 1807, the *North River Steamboat* took its very first trip from New York City to Albany on the Hudson River. The trip took 32 hours to go upriver, and it was even faster coming back! That might seem like a long time, but back then, people usually used keelboats to travel. Keelboats could go upriver, but very slowly, and it took a lot of hard rowing or sailing to fight against the river's strong current. **[Reference Rowing Image]** Fulton's steamboat was so exciting because it could move much faster and easier than any boat before! People could send goods and travel up and down the river more quickly, which made life better.

ASK Students

What could keelboats do that rowboats and sailboats could not do?

TELL Students 📷🔑

After its first **voyage**—a trip from one place to another—the steamboat began carrying both people and goods up and down the Hudson River, making life much easier for everyone.

Lesson

TELL Students (Continued)

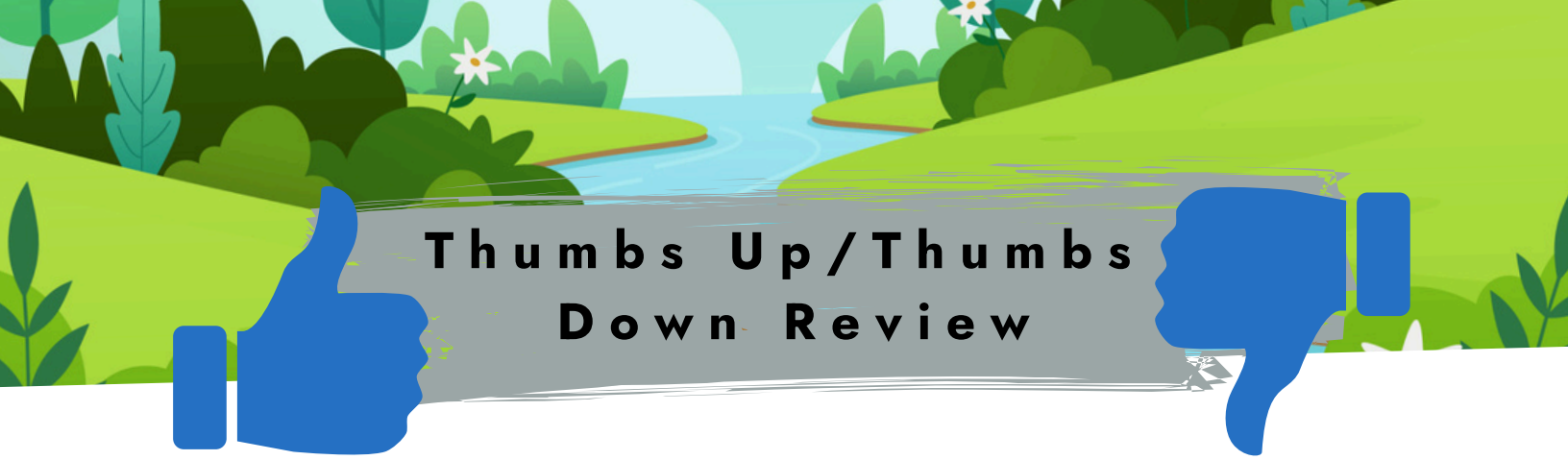
People started calling the *North River Steamboat* the *Clermont*, after Robert Livingston's large plantation on the river. **[Reference *Clermont* Image]** Passengers paid $7 for a one-way trip, which was a very large amount of money at the time! Even so, the speed and convenience of the steamboat made the cost worthwhile. This was very important in history because the steamboat helped communities grow and allowed factories and farmers to send their goods farther and faster than ever before. People could get food, supplies, and new inventions more quickly, which made life better for everyone. Fulton's success shows the power of perseverance—he kept trying, even when building the steamboat was very hard. Because he never gave up, he helped change transportation in America forever!

ASK Students

Why is Robert Fulton important?

TELL Students

Robert Fulton is important in American history because he was a **visionary**—a person who creatively thinks about the future and imagines new ways to make life better. **[Reference Visionary Image]** His steamboats helped our country grow and change. They moved goods quickly along rivers, making it easier for factories to send products to people who needed them. With faster shipping, families and communities could get food, supplies, and new inventions much more quickly, which made daily life easier. Fulton's work helped start a whole new era of invention and transportation in America. **[Reference American Flag Image]** His story also teaches us an important lesson: we can accomplish amazing things when we use our creativity, work hard, and never give up—even when a task is difficult. His perseverance, imagination, and visionary thinking changed the way Americans lived, worked, and traveled. Just like Fulton, we can solve big problems, reach our goals, and make a difference in the world if we keep trying and never quit. These qualities—determination, creativity, vision, and effort—are at the heart of the American dream and inspire us to be innovators in our own lives.



Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down Review

Objective

Students will recall key ideas from the Robert Fulton lesson and connect them to the concepts of perseverance, inventing, and improving transportation.

Instructions

Read each statement aloud, and have students respond with thumbs up if the statement is true or thumbs down if it is not. Encourage them to explain their answer in a sentence.

Activity Statements

1. Thumbs up if you've ever tried to do something that was really tricky.
2. Thumbs up if you wanted to give up but kept trying anyway.
3. Thumbs up if you've ever imagined a new way to do something.
4. Thumbs up if you've ever helped carry something heavy from one place to another, like groceries or school supplies.
5. Thumbs up if you think it's important to keep trying when something is hard.
6. Thumbs up if you think moving goods on rivers would be easier with a boat that doesn't need oars or wind.
7. Thumbs up if you would like to invent something new that helps people.
8. Thumbs up if you think it would be exciting to ride on a steamboat that goes really fast.
9. Thumbs up if you've ever improved something you already use, like making a game or toy easier to play with.
10. Thumbs up if you think Robert Fulton was brave for never giving up, even when people made fun of him.

Follow-Up Discussion

After the activity, ask:

- "What do you notice about the statements you gave a thumbs up to?"
- "How is trying again like what Robert Fulton did?"
- "What could you invent or improve if you never gave up?"



Build Your Own Steamboat

Objective

Students will understand how perseverance and innovation help solve problems by designing and testing their own model boats that can move against a "current."

Materials

- Small containers or bins filled with water (to act as rivers)
- Plastic cups, small plastic containers, or foam boats
- Straws
- Rubber bands
- Paper clips
- Small pieces of paper (to act as "cargo")
- Towels for spills
- Optional: small fan or cup of water to create a moving current

Activity Instructions

1. Introduce the Challenge:
    - Tell the students: "Just like Robert Fulton wanted to move a boat against the river current, today you are going to try to move your boat with cargo from one side of the river to the other. You can use the materials on your table to make your boat move without touching it directly in the water!"
2. Explain the Tools:
    - Show students the materials they can use (cups, straws, rubber bands, paper clips) and let them know they can create paddles, sails, or steam-engine-inspired pushers to move the boat.
3. Set Up the River:
    - Fill bins with water to represent a river. Create a "current" by gently moving the water with your hand or a small fan.
4. Design Time:
    - Give students 5–10 minutes to design and decorate their boats. Remind them to think like Robert Fulton—be creative, think of ways to make their boats move faster, and don't give up if it doesn't work the first time.



5. Test the Boats:
    - Students place their boats in the water and see if it will carry the paper cargo across the river. Encourage them to adjust or redesign if the boat tips over or moves too slowly.
6. Reflect:
    - After testing, ask:
        - "What worked well for your boat?"
        - "What didn't work the first time, and how did you try again?"
        - "How is this like what Robert Fulton did when he built a steamboat?"
7. Connect to History:
    - Explain that Fulton had to try many designs, fail sometimes, and keep improving his idea. Because of his perseverance, he invented something that changed transportation forever—just like the students improved their boats.

Learning Outcome

Students will see that perseverance and creativity are key to solving problems. They will understand how innovation can improve transportation and make life easier for communities, just like Robert Fulton's steamboat.

Optional Extension

Have students "race" their boats with a small current to see whose design is most effective, emphasizing that testing and trying again is part of innovation.

Resources

National Council Standards for Social Studies

"Studying the past makes it possible for us to understand the human story across time."(NCSS, 1921)

"Knowledge and understanding of the past enable us to analyze the causes and consequences of events and developments and to place these in the context of the institutions, values, and beliefs of the periods in which they took place." (NCSS, 1921)

"The study of people, places, and environments enables us to understand the relationship between human populations and the physical world." (NCSS, 1921)

"Questions related to identity and development, which are important in psychology, sociology, and anthropology, are central to understanding who we are." (NCSS, 1921)

"The study of individual development and identity will help students to describe factors important to the development of personal identity." (NCSS, 1921)

- https://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Portals/46/docs/recreation/OP-CO/montgomery/pdfs/10thand11th/ahistoryofsteamboats.pdf
- https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/steamboat
- http://www.southernlancasterhistory.org/robert-fulton-birthplace
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- https://lemelson.mit.edu/resources/robert-fulton
- https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/17/opinion/l-why-fulton-achieved-steamboat-success-003087.html
- http://www.southernlancasterhistory.org/robert-fulton-birthplace
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Resources

- https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/17/opinion/l-why-fulton-achieved-steamboat-success-003087.html
- https://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Portals/46/docs/recreation/OPCO/montgomery/pdfs/10thand11th/ahistoryofsteamboats.pdf
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- https://www.sam.usace.army.mil/Portals/46/docs/recreation/OPCO/montgomery/pdfs/10thand11th/ahistoryofsteamboats.pdf

Images

Mississippi River



Credit: Canva Pro

Hudson River



Credit: Canva Pro

Images

Community



Credit: Canva Pro

Robert Fulton



Credit: Wikipedia

Images

Perseverance



Credit: Canva Pro

Innovator



Credit: Canva Pro

Images

Steamboat



Credit: Canva Pro

Transportation



Credit: Canva Pro

Images

Oar



Credit: Canva Pro

Rowboat



Credit: Canva Pro

Images

Sailboat



Credit: Canva Pro

Keelboat



Credit: Wikipedia

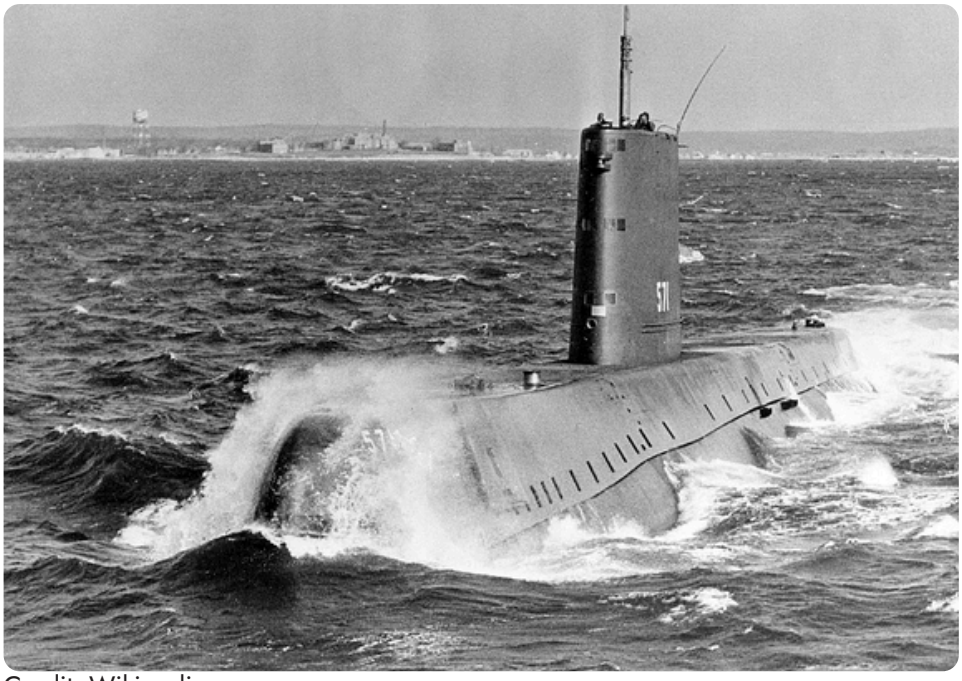
Images

Artist



Credit: Canva Pro

Nautilus



Credit: Wikipedia

Images

Engineering



Credit: Canva Pro

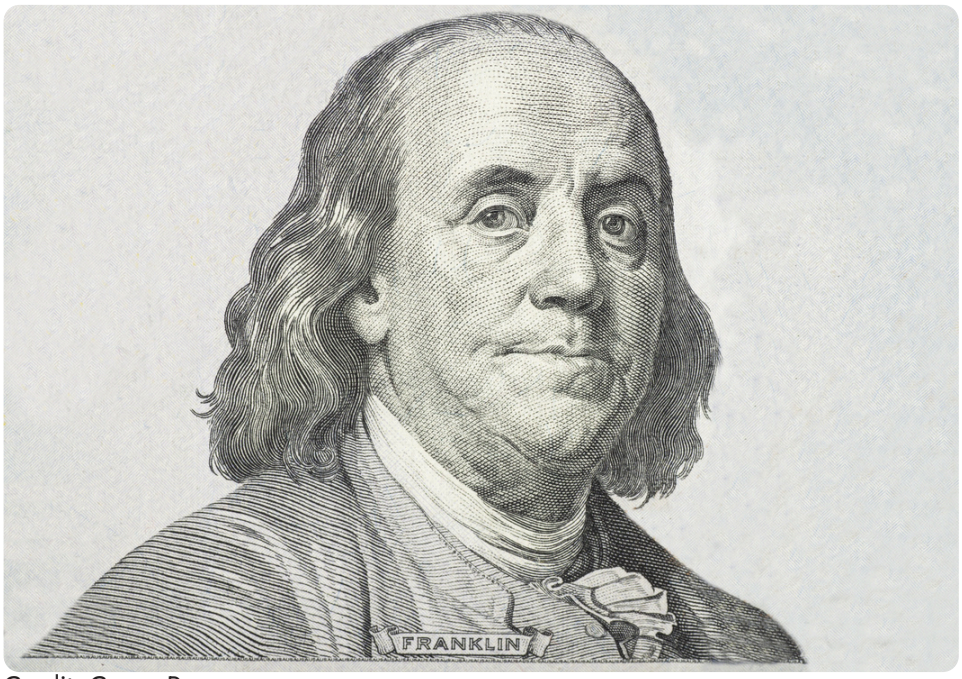
Robert Livingston



Credit: Wikipedia

Images

Benjamin Franklin



Credit: Canva Pro

North River Steamboat



Credit: Wikipedia

Images

Rowing



Credit: Canva Pro

Clermont



Credit: Wikipedia

Images

Visionary



Credit: Canva Pro

American Flag



Credit: Canva Pro

Notes