

# The Panama Canal

## Pre-Reading

### A. Warm-Up Questions

1. Look at a world map and find the Panama Canal. How did the building of this canal change world shipping transportation?
2. Do you know when the Panama Canal was officially opened?
3. How long do you think it took to build the canal?
4. What kinds of problems do you think were involved in the building of this canal?
5. How many ships do you think pass through the canal every year?

### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many meanings and words as you can. Check this exercise again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| ___ 1. abandon    | a) to assume control                             |
| ___ 2. tow        | b) movement forward, improvement                 |
| ___ 3. locomotive | c) reproducing, making more                      |
| ___ 4. poisonous  | d) to let water flow away, to empty water        |
| ___ 5. progress   | e) to pull                                       |
| ___ 6. swamp      | f) an action showing great skill                 |
| ___ 7. drain      | g) part of a canal where the water level changes |
| ___ 8. breeding   | h) to go away from                               |
| ___ 9. cruise     | i) toxic, causing death or injury                |
| ___ 10. feat      | j) an engine used for pulling                    |
| ___ 11. take over | k) soft and wet land                             |
| ___ 12. lock      | l) to travel by sea                              |



## Reading

1. The Panama Canal is a waterway that crosses the Central American country of Panama and connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Ships can pass from one ocean to the other without making the long journey around the tip of South America. The canal opened officially on August 15, 1914.
2. From the Atlantic, ships pass through a set of **locks** (sections of the canal that are closed off with gates) that raise them 85 feet (about 26 meters) above sea level to a lake. After passing through the lake, they are lowered to the Pacific through another series of locks. Small **locomotives tow** them through the locks, which are paired so ships can pass in both directions. The canal is 51 miles (about 82 kilometers) long, and ships take about 15 hours to pass through it.
3. A French company began digging the Panama Canal on January 20, 1882. By the time it **abandoned** the project in 1888, thousands of workers had died in floodwater or mudslides, or from the extreme heat, **poisonous** snakebites, or tropical diseases. The company had spent over \$285 million to build 11 miles (about 18 kilometers) of the canal.
4. The United States government **took over** its construction in 1904, but little **progress** was made in the first year. In 1905, John Stevens became project leader and made two important changes. First, he had **swamps drained** to prevent disease-carrying mosquitoes from **breeding**, and he made sure that workers were safely housed and well fed. Second, he changed the building plan from a sea-level canal to a lock-based canal. Nine years later, the canal was finished.
5. The canal took 34 years to build and cost over \$600 million. Of the 80,000 people who worked on it, over 30,000 died while doing so.
6. Today, over 14,000 ships pass through the Panama Canal each year. This includes **cruise** ships carrying thousands of tourists who want to see one of the greatest engineering **feats** in the world.

*“A finer body of men has never been gathered by any nation than the men who have done the work of building the Panama Canal...”*

—Theodore Roosevelt

## Comprehension

### A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. A French company started the original work on the Panama Canal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The French government completed the construction of the Panama Canal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. It takes about 51 hours for a ship to pass through the Panama Canal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Thousands of people lost their lives during the building of this canal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Ships can only pass through the locks in one direction at a time.

### B. Ask and Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner.

Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

1. How did ships pass from the Atlantic to the Pacific before the Panama Canal was built?
2. Explain briefly how ships pass through the Panama Canal.
3. How long is the canal and how long does it take for ships to pass through it?
4. Why did the original French company abandon the project?
5. What two changes did John Stevens make when he became the project leader?
6. How long did it take to build the Panama Canal and what was the cost?
7. Why do many tourists want to see the Panama Canal?

## Vocabulary Review

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1.  
You may need to change the word forms.

1. The company president is very sick now, so his son is going to \_\_\_\_\_ for him.
2. She studies hard every night. She is making great \_\_\_\_\_ in her schoolwork.
3. The engineer driving the \_\_\_\_\_ was injured when the truck went through the railway crossing.
4. Swamps are \_\_\_\_\_ grounds for mosquitoes.
5. Last year he climbed Mount Everest. What an amazing \_\_\_\_\_ !
6. You should keep all \_\_\_\_\_ cleaning supplies in a locked cupboard or a cupboard that the children cannot reach.
7. Even though Robert is planning to get a divorce, he will never \_\_\_\_\_ his children.
8. My kitchen sink will not \_\_\_\_\_. I have to call a plumber to fix it.
9. Last year we went skiing for our holiday. This year we are planning a Mediterranean \_\_\_\_\_ .
10. My car broke down on the way to work. I had to call a \_\_\_\_\_ truck.

## Discussion

1. Have you ever been on a boat that has traveled through locks? If so, describe the situation to your classmates.
2. The building of the Panama Canal cost thousands of human lives. What other construction projects around the world have also resulted in many deaths?
3. The Panama Canal is considered one of the greatest engineering feats in the world. Name several others. Where are they located?
4. Do you think the Panama Canal would have been completed if John Stevens hadn't improved the working conditions for the people working on the project?