

## The Canal Era Fact Sheet<sup>1</sup>

A **canal** is a man-made waterway used to transport people, products, or water.

### Internal Improvement

- The **James River Company (JRC)** was formed in 1785 and was in charge of building canals along the James River. **George Washington** was its Honorary President.
  - Before building the canal, the JRC had to remove boulders from the riverbed and make the river deeper.
  - The James River Company's first canal was 7 miles long and operated near Richmond.
- The JRC Canal was the first system in the U.S. with **locks**, which increased the amount of cargo that could be transported.
  - A **lock** is a section of canal or river that may be closed off by gates to control the water level to raise or lower boats passing through.<sup>2</sup>
- Scott's Landing was incorporated and became the town of **Scottsville** in 1818. The town continued to have success as a major trading port.

### Going Public

- Virginia's government purchased the James River Company in 1820 after the private company failed to make progress on the canal for several years.
- The James River Company merged with another company to create the **James River and Kanawha Canal Company (JR&KC)** in 1832. In 1840, the company finished the first 147-mile section of the canal, which linked the cities of **Richmond** and **Lynchburg**.

### A Grueling Task/Scottsville and the JR&KC

- Building a canal was hard work and very dangerous. New **immigrants** and **slaves** were often given the most dangerous and difficult tasks, like clearing land, blasting large rocks, and digging the canal ditch.
- The new canal brought **jobs** to Scottsville.
  - Residents helped build the canal, worked in the stables, and at hotels and restaurants that were popular with travelers.

### Insurmountable Competition

- As **railroads** became more popular about 1850, canals began losing money.
  - The JR&KC was forced to lower tolls to compete with railroads in Virginia, and the canal lost more than \$100,000 in seven years.

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<sup>1</sup> Information on this sheet is adapted from the exhibit text developed by Lauren Turek and Julie Schiff.

<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://www.starling101.btinternet.co.uk/canals/lckworks.htm#>

## Civil War

- Canals were essential to the ***Confederates*** in Virginia during the ***Civil War***.
- The JR&K Canal helped the Confederate Army ***transport troops and supplies*** throughout Virginia.
  - When hospitals in Richmond were over-crowded, ***injured soldiers*** were sent to hospitals in other towns. They were transported using the JR&K Canal and taken to hospitals set up in community buildings (usually churches and schools) in towns like Scottsville.
- In March 1865, ***Union General Philip Sheridan and his soldiers***, damaged locks, bridges, berms, and boats that were all part of the Scottsville section of the JR&K Canal.

## The End of an Era

- Damage from the ***Civil War***, devastating ***floods***, and the growth of ***railroads*** forced the JR&KC to sell the company to the ***Richmond and Allegheny Railroad Company*** (later ***C&O Railroad***) in 1880.
  - The ***C&O Railroad Company*** laid railroad tracks over the old canal towpath. They used canal boats to carry railroad ties and other construction supplies.

**Game Questions**  
**Station 4: The Canal Era**

**What is a canal?**

**What famous Virginian served as honorary President of the James River Company?**

**How do locks control water flow and increase the amount of cargo that boats can transport?**

**Scott's Landing was incorporated as a town in 1818 and changed its name to what?**

**What two important Virginia cities were linked by the JR&K Canal?**

**Name one job that the canal's construction and use brought to Scottsville.**

**Why was the JR&K Canal important to the Confederate Army during the Civil War?**

**Why were many soldiers sent to Scottsville from Richmond?**

**What mode of transportation competed with canals and forced the JR&K Canal to close in 1880?**

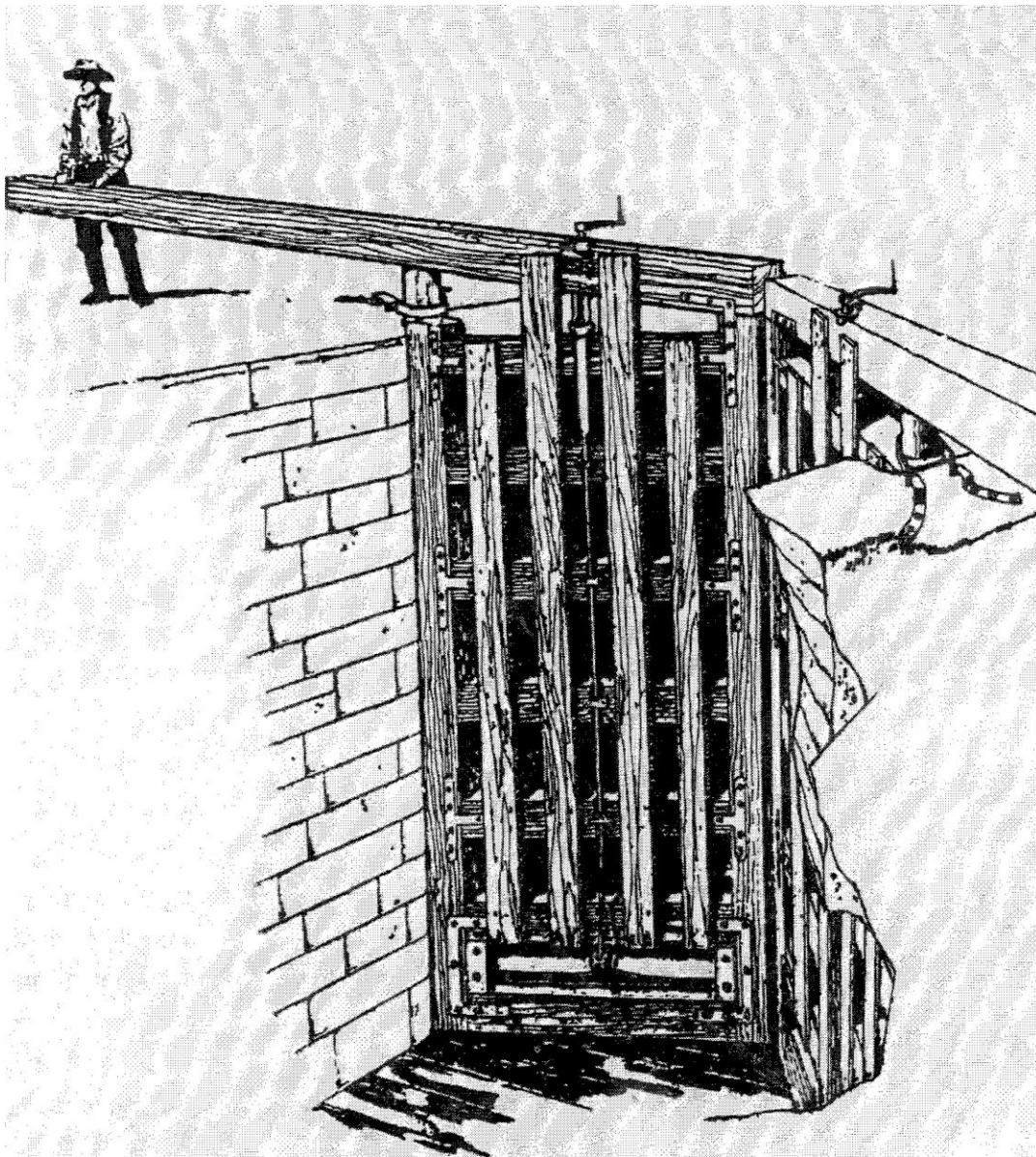
**Why do you think General Sheridan damaged the Scottsville section of the JR&K Canal?**

# A

## Find out how a canal lock works

### Directions:

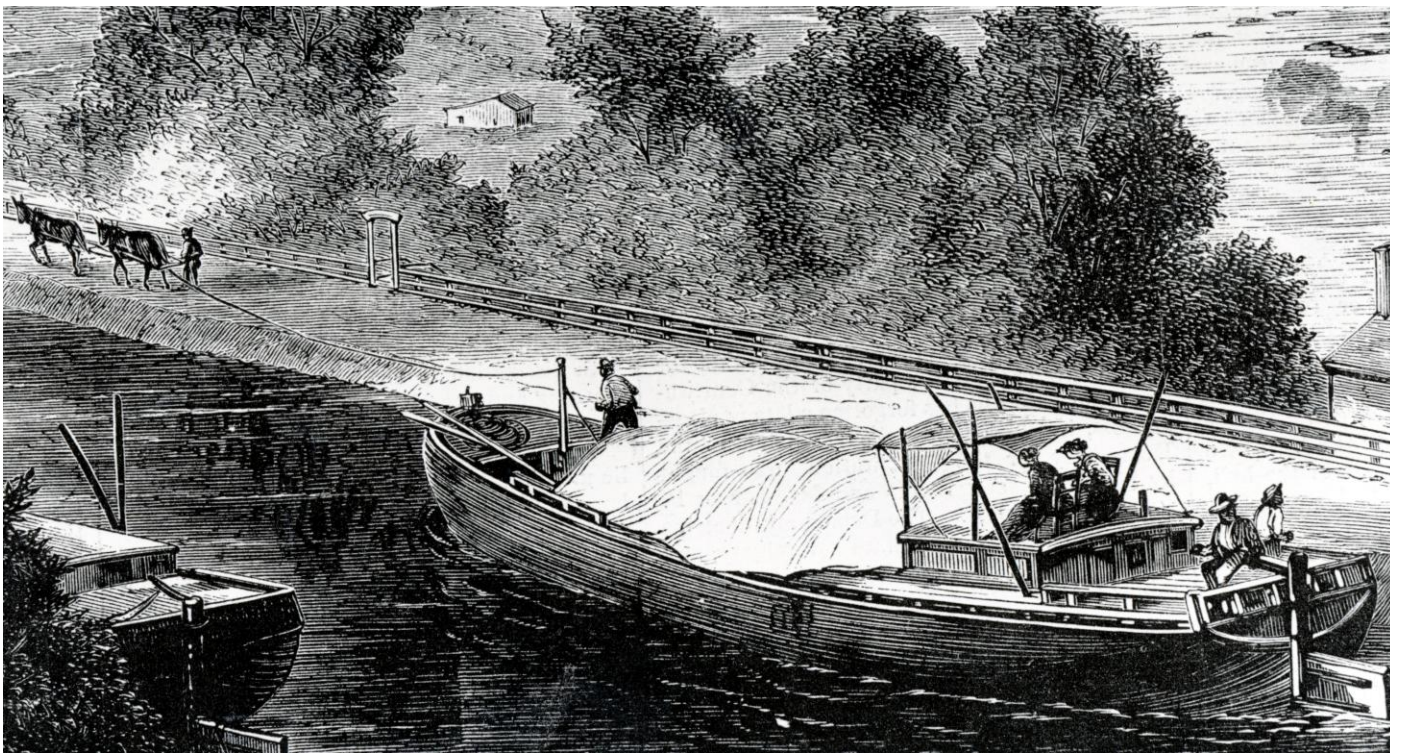
1. Look at the picture of a lock below and read the words to know on the back of this page.
2. Use the cards on the next page to move the boat through the lock and further down the canal!
  - Match the picture with the description of what is happening



A lock on the James River and Kanawha Canal.

## Words to Know:

- **Lock**: A section of a canal with water-tight doors at each end. When a boat is between the doors, the water level can be raised or lowered to let the boat move up or down stream.
- **Sluice or wicket**: a smaller door inside the big lock door that can be opened or closed to change the water level.
- **Tow path**: a path beside the canal where mules or horses walked as they pulled the boat



- **Tow line**: a heavy rope that ties the animal to the boat; untied when the boat goes through a lock

**Mules pull the  
boat toward  
the lock from  
the  
downstream  
side.**

**Step 1**

**The mules  
are  
unhitched  
from the  
boat.**

**Step 2**

**The mules  
walk on a  
towpath  
across the top  
of the lock to  
wait on the  
other side.**

# Step 3

**The boat  
drifts slowly  
into the lock.**

**Step 4**

**The  
downstream  
gate is  
closed and  
the boat is  
closed in.**

# Step 5

**Sluices (or  
wickets) are  
opened on  
the upstream  
gate.**

# Step 6

**The water  
level inside  
the lock rises  
until it  
reaches the  
same level as  
upstream.**

# Step 7

**The  
upstream  
lock gates  
are opened.**

# Step 8

**The mules  
are  
reattached to  
the boat  
using the tow  
line.**

# Step 9

**The mules  
pull the boat  
out of the  
lock and the  
upstream  
gate is  
closed.**

# Step 10

**The boat  
continues on  
its journey.**

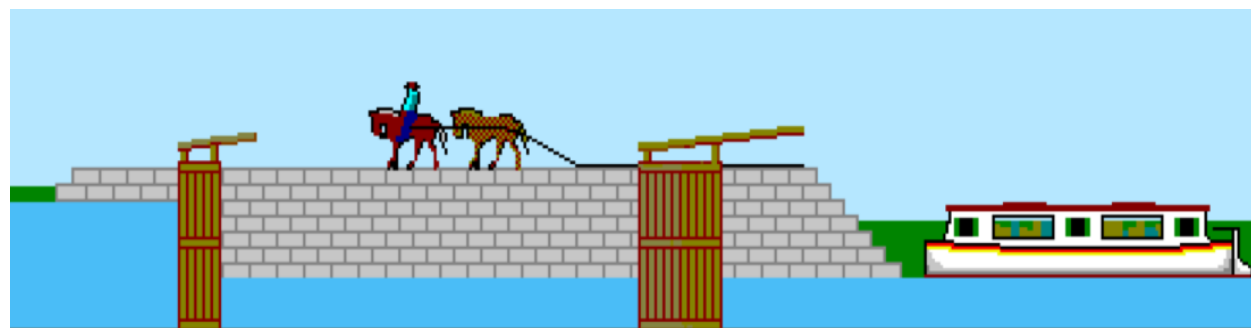
# Step 11

**The  
downstream  
lock gate is  
open so the  
water level  
goes back  
down and is  
ready for the  
next boat.**

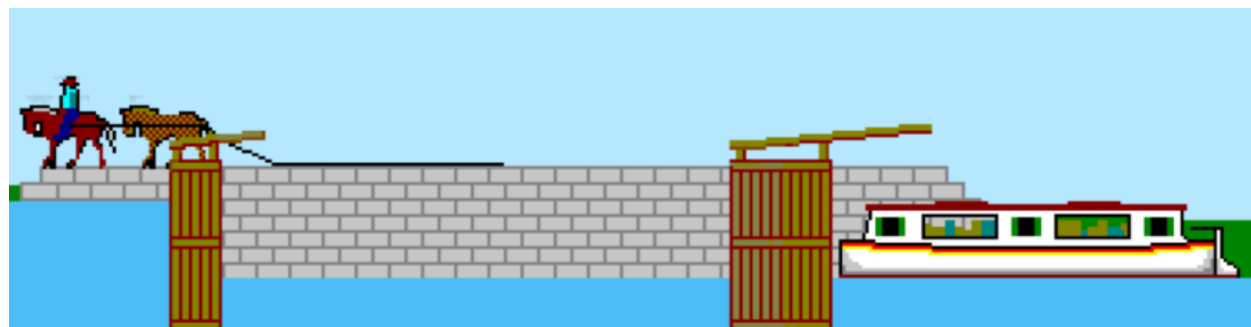
# Step 12



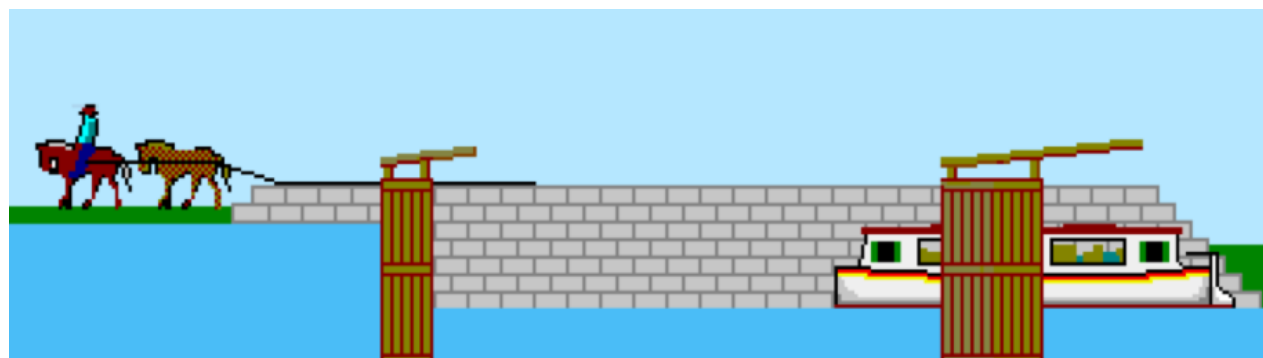
**Step 1**



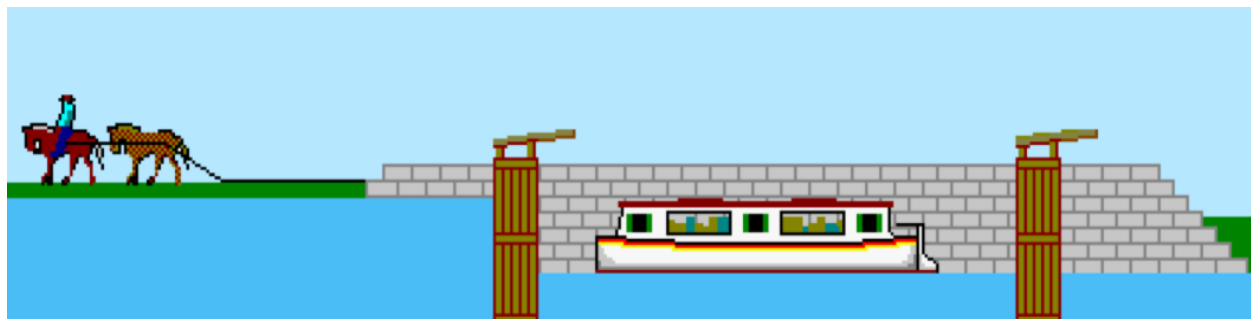
**Step 2**



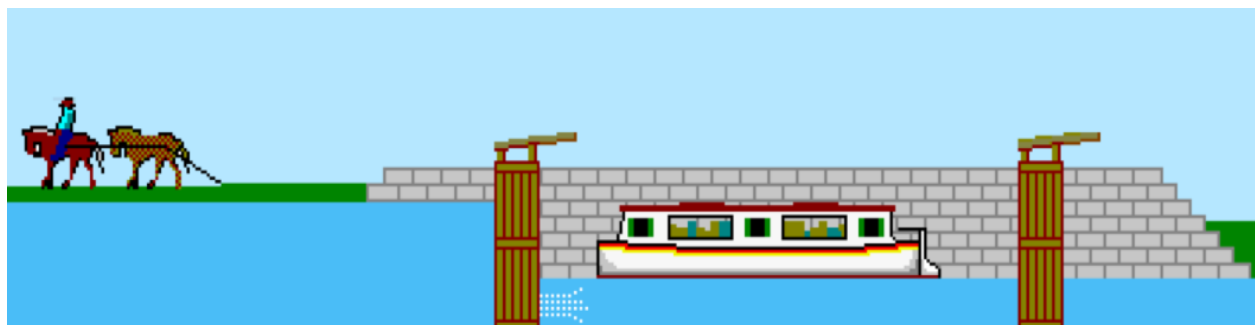
**Step 3**



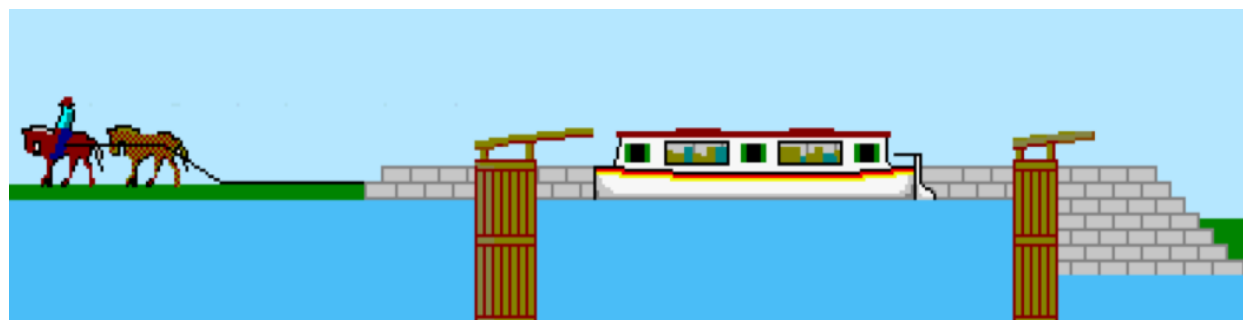
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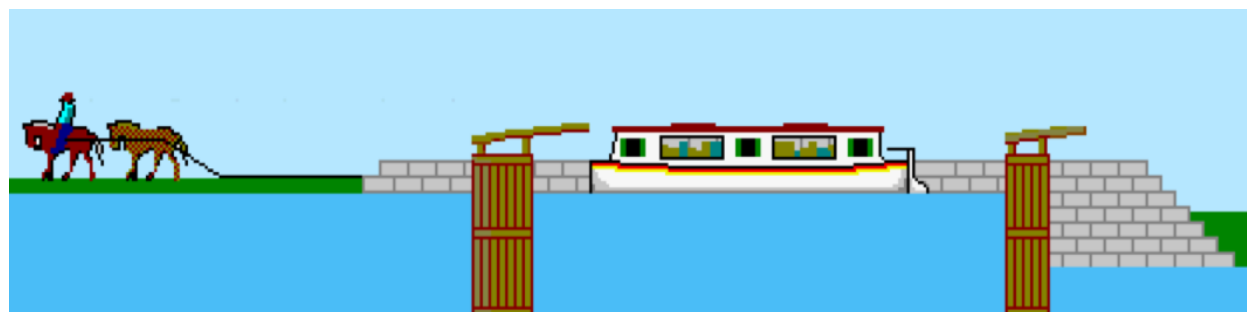
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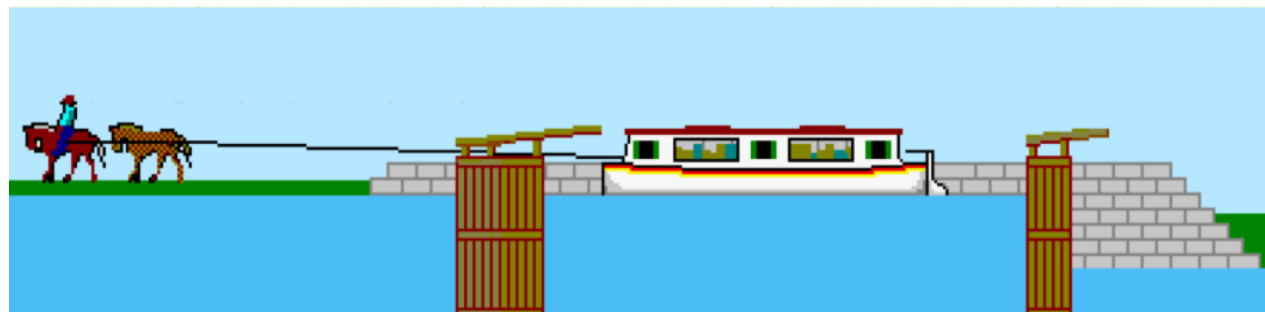
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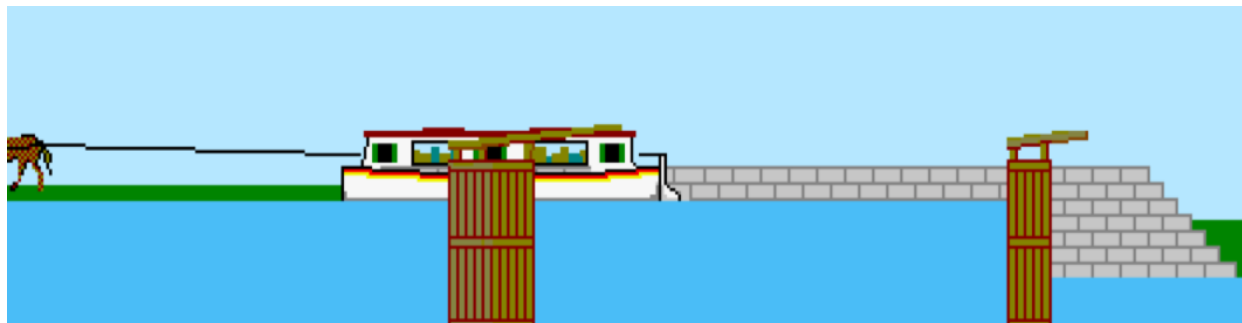
**Step 7**



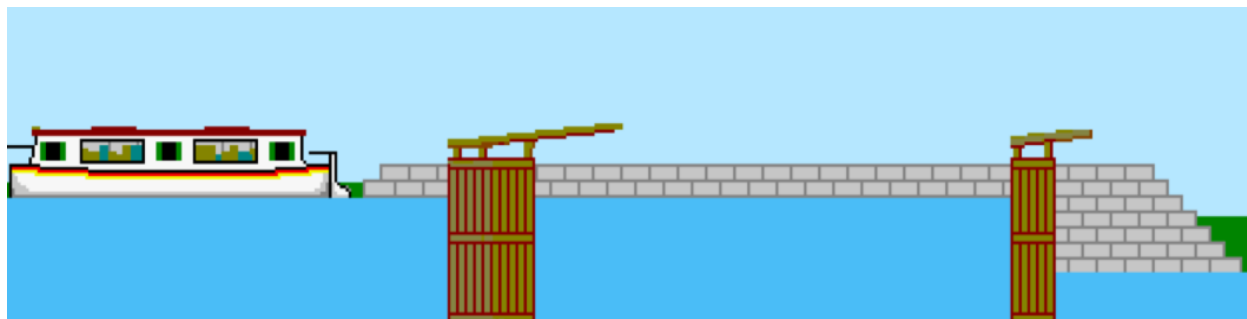
**Step 8**



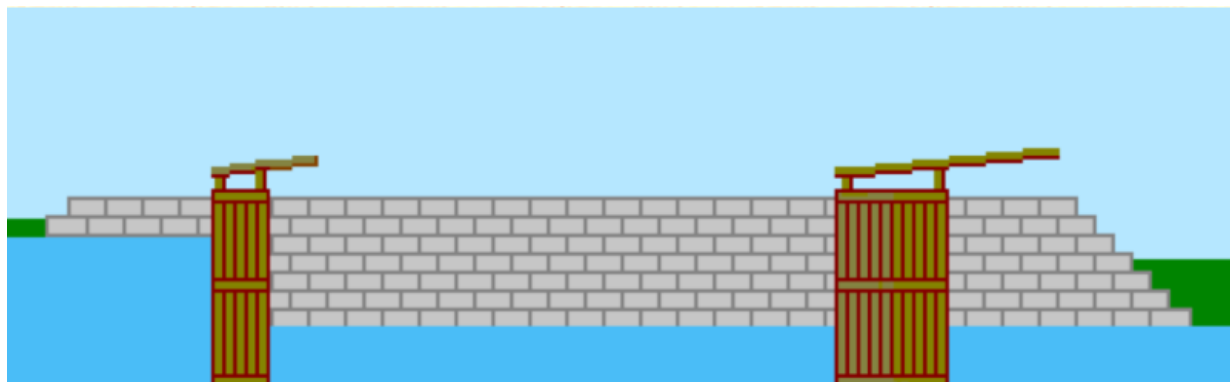
# Step 9



# Step 10



# Step 11



# Step 12