

# Erie Canal Mythbusters

This lesson can be used as a pre-unit or post-unit assessment as well as a student learning guide. Students use the Erie Canal Mythbusters Student Page to determine whether each statement relating to the Erie Canal is a fact or a myth. They can keep the page close and refer to it as they work through the unit, proving facts and debunking myths.

**Lesson Duration:** 45 minutes including discussion around Teacher Questions; 5-15 minutes when used as a pre/post-unit assessment

**Enduring Understanding:** Evidence can be used to prove statements to be true or false.

**Concepts:** fact/myth, evidence, primary source documents

**New York State Social Studies Standards Addressed:**

All NYS Social Studies Standards could be addressed in this lesson.

**New York State Social Studies Practices Addressed:**

All NYS Social Studies Practices could be addressed in this lesson.

**Teacher Questions:**

1. What is a fact? What is a myth?
2. How are facts proven and myths debunked?
3. Why are primary source documents important?

**Materials List:**

1. Erie Canal Mythbusters Student Page with “fact or myth” statements (provided)
2. Erie Canal Mythbusters Teacher Page with “fact or myth” statements and answers (provided)

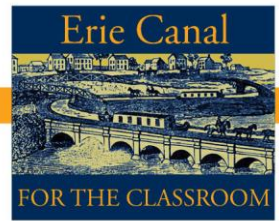
**Procedure:**

Teacher Questions	Procedure	Materials
1. What is a fact? What is a myth? 2. How are facts proven and myths debunked? 3. Why are primary source documents important?	<p><b>10 minutes:</b> Introduce the concepts of fact and myth by eliciting student background knowledge. Some students may have seen the popular television show <i>MythBusters</i>. The teacher may choose to show a clip of one of the show’s episodes.</p> <p>Next introduce the Erie Canal Mythbusters Student Page containing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erie Canal Mythbusters Student Page with “fact or myth” statements (provided)</li> </ul>



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	<p>Erie Canal-related statements of fact and myth.</p> <p>TEACHER NOTE: If using this lesson as a pre-unit assessment, explain that students should keep this page close to refer to throughout the unit as they prove facts and debunk myths about the Erie Canal.</p>	
<p>1. What is a fact? What is a myth?</p>	<p><b>5 minutes:</b> Students read each statement on the Erie Canal Mythbusters Student Page and determine if the statement is a Fact or a Myth, circling their answer.</p> <p>TEACHER NOTE: If using this lesson as a pre-assessment, collect the students' completed pages and record their scores before returning the pages to the students to refer to throughout the unit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erie Canal Mythbusters Student Page with "fact or myth" statements (provided)</li> <li>• Erie Canal Mythbusters Teacher Page with "fact or myth" statements and answers (provided)</li> </ul>
<p>1. What is a fact? What is a myth? 2. How are facts proven and myths debunked? 3. Why are primary source documents important?</p>	<p><b>30 minutes:</b> OPTIONAL: Teacher models how to prove a fact or debunk a myth by investigating one of the statements together as a class. The teacher may also choose to model this when one of the statements is uncovered during an inquiry lesson throughout the unit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erie Canal Mythbusters Teacher Page with "fact or myth" statements and answers (provided)</li> </ul>



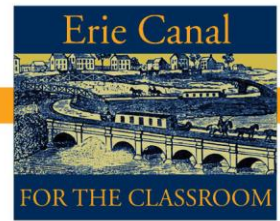
# Erie Canal Mythbusters

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Erie Canal Mythbusters Student Page

Directions: Read each statement about the Erie Canal and determine if the statement is a Fact or a Myth. Circle your answer.

1. The Erie Canal made it faster and easier to transport people and goods across New York State.	Fact	Myth
2. The United States was the first country to build a canal for transportation.	Fact	Myth
3. New York State is flat, so it was easy to build the Erie Canal across it.	Fact	Myth
4. DeWitt Clinton was a powerful political leader who convinced people to build the Erie Canal across New York State.	Fact	Myth
5. The Erie Canal was nicknamed "Clinton's Ditch" because some people thought it was impossible to build and made fun of the project.	Fact	Myth
6. At the time it was built, the Erie Canal was the longest human-made waterway in North America.	Fact	Myth
7. The Erie Canal was built by experienced engineers.	Fact	Myth
8. The Erie Canal was dug almost entirely by hand and animal power.	Fact	Myth
9. Building the Erie Canal only affected people living in Buffalo and Albany.	Fact	Myth
10. The Erie Canal is the same today as it was when it was first built.	Fact	Myth



# Erie Canal Mythbusters

## Erie Canal Mythbusters Teacher Page

1. The Erie Canal made it faster and easier to transport people and goods across New York State.  
**Fact**
2. The United States was the first country to build a canal for transportation.  
**Myth: Canals existed for centuries before the United States was formed.**
3. New York State is flat, so it was easy to build the Erie Canal across it.  
**Myth: There is a change in elevation of more than 560 feet from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. Traversing the state required a system of 83 locks to raise and lower boats over this changing landscape. It also involved clearing forests and blasting through rocky cliffs. Building the Erie Canal was not easy!**
4. DeWitt Clinton was a powerful political leader who convinced people to build the Erie Canal across New York State. **Fact**
5. The Erie Canal was nicknamed “Clinton’s Ditch” because some people thought it was impossible to build and made fun of the project. **Fact**
6. At the time it was built, the Erie Canal was the longest human-made waterway in North America. **Fact**
7. The Erie Canal was built by experienced engineers.  
**Myth: Engineering was a new profession in America that emerged as the Erie Canal was being built. The men in charge of the project came from other professions: judges, land surveyors, a schoolteacher. They learned how to be engineers by working on the canal.**
8. The Erie Canal was dug almost entirely by hand and animal power. **Fact**
9. Building the Erie Canal only affected people living in Buffalo and Albany.  
**Myth: The Erie Canal was a statewide project, and it had a statewide impact (and beyond).**
10. The Erie Canal is the same today as it was when it was first built.  
**Myth: The original Erie Canal was enlarged twice between 1835 and 1900, with changes to its locks, bridges, aqueducts, and other infrastructure. Between 1905 and 1918, the original canal was supplanted by the much larger and more modern New York State Barge Canal, with a significantly different path than the original. Use of the canal has shifted from transportation to recreation, as well. Vestiges of the original Erie Canal can be seen in places like downtown Rochester, where the former Genesee Aqueduct was repurposed to carry the Rochester Subway and Broad Street Bridge, and later became a site for graffiti art, punk shows, and other countercultural activities.**