

The Erie is **HERE** and Not **THERE!**
A Lesson to be used with the *Atlas of New York:
Legacies of the Erie Canal*
New York Geographic Alliance

In the early days of the United States, transportation into the interior was a big problem. Most people lived within 100 miles of the coast. Those who moved west were isolated. Let's investigate why this was so, and how canals were a solution.

Open up the "Clickable PDF" called *Canals_East_USA_hillshaded*. It's on the CD-ROM that comes with the *Atlas of New York: Legacies of the Erie Canal*. It's clickable, because you can turn layers on and off.

Find the Layers Icon (stack of papers) in the upper left corner. These layers should be clicked OFF: Canals, New York City, Major Rivers (both of them), State borders today. This gives us a basic **relief** map.

1. What does the darkness of the brown shading tell us? _____

2. There is a mountain range running north to south. What is that called?

3. Turn on the **Major Rivers** layers. Those rivers on the east side of the mountains flow toward the _____ Ocean, but those west of the mountains flow into the _____ River and then into the Gulf of _____. They are NOT connected. That is bad for transportation in the early 1800s!
4. Building a *canal* is a possible solution to the problem. This man-made waterway can cross from one watershed to another. A canal in Virginia could connect the Potomac River to the Ohio River. The Ohio River is navigable to the Mississippi River. There is one problem – canals are not practical in the mountains. Why not?

You need a place where there is a break in the mountains, a low level route. There are only two. The first is the Hudson River, which has cut a path through the Highlands (near West Point, NY).

5. The second one is in cell D3. What do you see there? What river flows through this lowland? _____
_____.

(Use the Atlas, p. 8 to help you).

6. Now you need to look at where canals were built in the eastern United States in the 1800s. The only that crosses New York State is the _____ Canal. It connects the _____ River to Lake Erie, one of the Great Lakes. This canal was practical because _____.

7. The map also shows a canal stretching across Pennsylvania from the Delaware River in the east to the _____ River in the west. But there is a problem! There is a gap in the canal in cell C4. Why is it there? _____

(They had to build an inclined railroad there to close the gap, but that meant taking the canal boats out of the water. Not very practical!)

8. New York built other canals after the Erie Canal proved to be very successful. One example was the Genesee Valley Canal that connected the Erie Canal in Rochester to the Allegheny River in Olean, NY. It was abandoned in 1875. Look at the map on the next page. Note two things. The Erie Canal is at a _____ elevation for its entire length. The Genesee Valley Canal, on the other hand, _____

9. One more thing... The Erie Canal connected the Great Lakes (Lake Erie to be more exact) to the Hudson River at Albany. The Hudson River flows south and it meets the Atlantic Ocean at _____ (HINT: It's the red dot on the map). The Hudson is navigable with steamboats. This meant that most of the trade from the Midwest went down the Erie Canal to the

Hudson River to _____ . That is why it is the largest city in the United States!

19th Century Canals in New York State

