



Raft-Away River

Teacher's Guide

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A product of Jacaranda Software

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Apple version programmed by Gerald M. Whuka

BBC version programmed by David L. Smith

Commodore 64 versions programmed by Philip O'Carroll

Microbee versions programmed by Gerald Preston

Aim of the program

Raft-Away River is an adventure simulation. From two to six players can be involved, and their task is to achieve a common goal, namely allowing the group to reach safety. To do this, each player will need to read and understand text, interpret information given in pictorial form, and plan how to reach the goal. Players will also need to discuss their strategies, as the goal is much easier to achieve if players cooperate and have a collective plan. Thus the program aims to provide students with an opportunity to develop skills in

- reading comprehension,
- communication,
- cooperative behaviour, and
- problem solving.

About the program

The adventure takes place beside a river in a remote wilderness area. The players are stranded after a boating calamity and the only route to safety is by river. So the players must build a raft. At the start of the game, they are sheltering in a cave on the west bank. There is only one tree on this side of the river and it will not provide enough timber for the raft. Therefore players must work out how to reach the east bank where there is plenty of timber. They also will find they have other things to think about, such as providing food for themselves. Meanwhile storm clouds gather and rain threatens to flood the river; the players need to finish their raft before the flood comes!

The activity begins with each player (represented by a stick figure) in the cave. At each stage the computer will say whose turn it is (using the player's name) and will give details such as what the player is carrying (e.g. an axe and/or matches) and whether the player is hungry or ill. The player must then decide what to do. There are twenty-one possible actions. Players must consider where they are, what tools they have, what resources are available and what their state of health is. (For example, to light the fire, one must be at the fireplace, with matches, and the fire must have dry wood on it.) In addition the player should consider the group's plan or strategy before deciding what to do.

How *Raft-Away River* helps to promote reading and language skills

Building the escape raft is a **team** effort, so all players will soon discover the importance of communication. They need to discuss plans, allocate tasks and organise "working parties".

Students gain information by reading the text on the computer screen and by noting the information in the picture. For example, the text may say that a player is starving or has caught a fish. The picture may show that a bridge is now complete or that there is only one log left in a woodpile. It is essential for each player to understand all this information if the group is to achieve its goal quickly (and so avoid the flood).

As well as reading and comprehending the text, and understanding the picture, players must make deductions based on this information. For example, building the raft is impossible if there is no wood available, so players must first work out how to get wood.

Of course, a player needs to consult the rest of the group before deciding what to do. Although each player decides what he or she is going to do, the overall plan will be decided by the whole group, and this involves a lot of discussion.

Prerequisite understanding

Players need to understand the information given in the Student's Guide before they use this program. This means that they should read the Student's Guide before starting. With younger children, however, the teacher may explain the object of the game to the pupils, as well as how to play it. Players must, of course, be capable of reading the text displayed on the screen if they are to use the program. The reading level of the Student's Guide is roughly year 5.

Students will need to understand that there are numerous restrictions on what they can do. They may be in the wrong place to perform some activity, they may not have the right tools or resources, or they may not be in good health. For example, you can't catch a fish in the cave; you can't go to the island unless the bridge is built; you can't carry heavy logs around if you are

ill or starving. However, it is recommended that students work out these restrictions for themselves.

The greatest benefit will come if the **students** discover the need to take all aspects of the situation into consideration, and then make sensible and realistic decisions.

Levels of difficulty

Raft-Away River has four levels of difficulty. This allows it to be used with a wide range of ages and abilities, as well as providing a further challenge for those who have mastered a given level.

The first level is EASY and it is recommended that all players start here. The MEDIUM level is a little harder. With the DIFFICULT game, the players need to plan carefully and have an efficient strategy if they are to succeed. The VERY DIFFICULT level may prove challenging even to a group of intelligent, cooperative adults! This level should not be attempted until one has successfully completed several DIFFICULT games.

Points regarding classroom use

1. From two to six players may take part. The cooperative element of the game is greater when more people play, though each player has to wait longer between turns.
2. Players need to talk to each other a lot while using this program, so they should be placed where they will not disrupt the rest of the class. It is recommended that only the people actually playing should be near the computer.
3. The program cannot be concluded prematurely. It continues until either the raft is built or the flood comes. Much of the benefit is lost if players have to leave before the end is reached.
4. The time required for a game depends very much on the number of players, their reading ability and age, and their familiarity with the game. While experts may finish in only ten minutes, many games may take half an hour and beginners may take considerably longer.
5. The operating instructions begin on page 5 of the Student's Guide.

Suggested follow-up activity

Talk to the children about their experience in playing *Raft-Away River*. If they failed to finish the raft (as will usually happen with first-time players), ask the children to explain what went wrong. Did they waste time trying to carry out actions in the wrong place or with the wrong tools? Did they realise the need to build bridges? Did they manage to provide cooked fish to eat? Did they understand all the text and realise what information the picture gave? Did they communicate with each other and make a plan? If so, did everyone follow the plan? Was the plan a good one? How could they do better next time? Are they ready to try one of the harder levels?

Explain to students that everything they read and see in *Raft-Away River* is important, and that the decisions they make from this information can lead to success or failure in a game.

