

In Need of Repairs: A Life as a Canawler Dilemma

It is August 1875, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal is bustling with traffic. Boats pulled by mules are carrying tons of coal, flour, iron and limestone down the man-made canal from Cumberland, Maryland to Georgetown, Washington DC. Since it opened in 1850, working on the C&O Canal has been your family's main source of income¹. Everyone in your family works on the boat and depends on the money earned from carrying coal to buy food, clothes and other necessary supplies.

Your boat, the *Southampton*, is now 25 years old. It has carried coal down the C&O Canal for many years and is in need of repairs. You notice that the boards on the bottom of the boat are beginning to rot and split apart. Also, on your last trip down the canal you noticed that the rudder² is not working properly and needs repairs. Repairing boats is very expensive because only a few master craftsmen are skilled enough for the job. As a result, you will need to use all of the money you have saved to pay for the repairs. After talking to the boate-wright,³ you also learn that it will take at least three months to make all the repairs the *Southampton* requires.

Each month the boat is not carrying coal; your family loses money and may be unable to buy food or clothing. The canal closes in November because of the ice that builds up during the winter. So you also worry that if the repairs take longer than expected and your boat is not repaired until November or December, you may not be able to haul coal for the rest of the season. This would mean that your family would not have enough money to get them through the long, cold Maryland winter.

However, once the *Southampton* is fixed, it should not need any work or repairs for several years. In the back of your mind you think that if you do not make these repairs, the boat is in danger of sinking and being completely destroyed. If the boat sinks, you would then have to buy a brand new boat. You are certain that you do not have enough money in your savings to buy a new boat if the *Southampton* sinks.

¹ Money earned from doing a job

² A device used to steer a ship or boat

³ A person who repairs boats

In Need of Repairs: A Life as a Canawler Dilemma

Directions: Answer the following questions to determine the best option. There are two options.

Identify at least 1 piece of information you need to know before you make a decision.

Option 1: Repair the boat now

- List at least 2 pros (good things) about the option to repair the boat.

- List at least 2 cons (bad things) about the option to repair the boat

Option 2: Repair the boat later

- List at least 2 pros (good things) about waiting to repair the boat later.

- List at least 2 cons (bad things) about waiting to repair the boat later.

Besides those stated in the dilemma, what are some other possible consequences and/or considerations that you need to keep in mind before making your decision?

What choice are you going to make?

Why do you believe that is the best choice?