

# Water the world's most essential commodity Literacy

Only 3% of all the water on earth is fresh water and 77% of this is locked up in ice caps and glaciers. It is a renewable but limited resource.

Clean water is therefore one of the most precious resources on earth. It is life's most important basic necessity. Dirty water on the other hand is one of the deadliest killers.

In the UK we usually have lots of water and have direct access to it via taps which very rarely stop running. What's more, the water coming out of taps in the UK is guaranteed clean and safe.

For many in the world however turning on a tap and watching it pour clear clean water is simply a pipe dream. Millions of people are often many miles away from a source of water. Often this water is dirty and unsafe to drink.

This series of leaflets highlights the effects of poor access to water and the unjust and unequal distribution of the world's most valuable resource.

## **A world thirsty for water justice**

The world's water supply is unfairly divided. In the UK we bathe, water our gardens, use water-guzzling washing machines and dishwashers while millions go without.

## **Clean water - the key to health**

It is inconceivable to us living in the UK that the water we drink and in which we wash would be anything but clean and safe. Yet an estimated 10 people die every minute from contaminated water. The World Health Organisation estimates that 80% of all sickness and disease in developing countries is due to unsafe water. In many countries surface water and water found in streams and lakes is deadly. It is home to all sorts of parasites and illnesses which kill millions of children world wide and cause lives of misery to many more. In the UK and other western countries we are fortunate that we have had the money to build sewers and water treatment plants to ensure safe water and high levels of hygiene.

## **Water access - millions go without**

In the year 2000 189 nations agreed the Millennium Development Goals, a set of goals and targets for tackling extreme poverty. One of the targets was to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. This is one of the few targets that have been met. Between 1990 and 2010, over two billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources, such as piped supplies and protected wells. However, still one in ten of the world's population does not have access to clean water. This, and lack of safe sanitation, result in over two million people dying from water-related diseases every year. Also, many millions of people, usually women and children, spend many hours every day fetching and carrying water, because there is no water supply where they live.

## **Water in short supply - who gets it?**

It is estimated that a third of all the world's countries will soon be permanently short of water. Yet in many of the countries with a shortage of water the rich have their swimming pools filled and their golf courses watered while the poor struggle to get any water at all. And to make it worse in many cities the rich get their water cheaply while the poor have to pay a much higher price for their miserably small allowance. Also big industrial or agricultural businesses often ruin people's water supply in the pursuit of profit by using water which could otherwise be used for local people's needs or by polluting their water supply.



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<b>Rachel's life is in a hole</b>	<b>Literacy Water</b>	
A literacy activity demonstrating how lack of access to water impacts on people's lives in poor countries	<b>45 mins</b>	<b>Year 3 and 4</b>

### **Suggested lesson structure**

The aim of this activity is to focus on summarising paragraphs of a non-fiction text and writing a summary which clearly identifies key ideas and messages.

### **Reading comprehension: shared, whole class**

*Rachel's story* should be read with the class to enable discussion on the key themes, ideas and messages of the story.

Before beginning the summarising activity, a useful whole class activity would be to write up two lists of contrasting bullet points based on children's observations and comments:

- how only having access to dirty unsafe water far from home affects Rachel's life;
- how having clean safe water near her home would change Rachel's life. (Use children's own experience of immediate access to clean water at home and at school when considering this)

This will provide a good starting point for group or paired work involving summarising. It provides an opportunity to demonstrate techniques for summarising in a few words the key themes, messages and ideas identified by the children.

### **Suggested questions which could be asked around the text and possible responses:**

- What kind of language does the author use? (emotive, repetitive)
- What is the mood of the text? (sad, reflective)
- What is the aim of the text?(to demonstrate how difficult it is for some people to get water; to demonstrate the value and importance of access to clean water; to provoke sympathy and empathy)
- What does the text not tell you? (*whether Rachel's husband works or what he does, what 'bad thing' has happened to Rachel and her family*)

### **Writing composition: guided group and independent work**

In groups or pairs, children should summarise in as few words as possible the important elements and key ideas in the text.

### **Suggested summary of Rachel's story**

*Rachel lives in a country called Tanzania. She spends her days collecting water from a hole in the ground.*

*Rachel has to walk with her baby a long way each day to reach the water because there is no water in the village where she lives. The water she collects is dirty and unsafe to drink.*

*Rachel is unhappy about her life and wishes it could be different. She knows she would be happier and be able to do many more things if she had water near her home.*

### **Shared text: identifying key ideas**

#### **Water is my life: Rachel's Story**

Here I am again, down in a hole in some rocks, scooping cloudy water into a bucket. I do this all day, everyday. It is not how I want my life to be.

You children, in your classroom far away, learning to read more, to write better, take a few minutes to listen to my story. Hear how an 18 year old woman comes to spend all day, everyday, down in a hole in some rocks, scooping cloudy water into a bucket.

My name is Rachel Anton, my baby is called Laurent Julius. My country is Tanzania. I live with my husband in a small village in the countryside. For everyone water is life, for me water is my life. We

have to drink, wash and cook like everyone else. Yet where I live there is no water. The land has dried up. Older people tell me there used to be so much more in wells – enough to live on. Something bad has happened, and it has happened to me and my family.

So everyday I get up early to walk the six kilometre journey from home to this waterhole. With Laurent Julius on my back, I have my hands free to carry four buckets and the scoop. Four buckets each day is just enough for our needs. I get to the waterhole at about 5am, and my day's work begins.

After scooping the cloudy water into the first bucket, I climb back out of the hole, and sit under a bough in the shade of the only tree. Then I wait for more water to collect in the hole, and down I go again. This goes on for as many as 15 long hours, until the buckets are full. Walking back is tough, late in the evening, with Laurent Julius on my back, my hands free to carry four full buckets. Then my day carries on, washing and cooking well into the night.

And imagine the colour of the water! It's just not safe. It often makes us ill. I am afraid that Laurent Julius will not grow up strong. Sometimes I am afraid he will not grow up at all.

Here I am then, a person down a hole. My name is Rachel – Rachel who walks, carries and scoops; Rachel who waits, scoops and walks; Rachel who carries, washes and cooks. Water is my life.

If we had clean water where I live it would be different. I could spend time working around the home and playing games with my son. I could talk to friends, and laugh and laugh. I could read more and write better. I would dance, my feet tapping the ground like raindrops.

Based on *Water is my life: Rachel's story* from WaterLiterate, a resource for the Literacy hour (WaterAid 1999)

## Further activities

### Thoughts on water

**A poem based on a speech given by Chief  
Seattle, an American Indian chief, in 1854**

*The shining water that moves in streams and rivers  
is not just water,*

*It is the blood of our ancestors.*

*You must remember that it is sacred,  
You must teach your children it is sacred.*

*Each ghostly reflection in the clear water of the lakes,  
Tells of events and memories in the life of my people.*

*The water's murmur  
Is the voice of my father's father.*

*The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst.*

*The rivers carry our canoes and feed our children.*

*You must henceforth give the rivers the kindness  
you would give any brother*

*Text supplied by Powys Environment and Development Education Centre*

## Activity ideas based on the poem

This is a suitable water poem for exploring how the use of expressive and descriptive language can create moods, build tension, and describe attitudes or emotions .

What is the author's intention and central message?

What words and phrases has the author chosen to create mood and tension? (E.g. *ghostly reflections, the water's murmur, water as a symbol of ancestral blood, water as a brother*)

## Group discussion activity

This activity enables children to practise listening and responding appropriately to others and talking effectively as members of a group.

Divide pupils into several groups. Give each group a copy of the 8 statements below. Ask pupils to discuss the statements and sort them according to statements into two groups – Agree/Disagree Allow groups to circulate round each group to discuss the similarities and differences allowing one person from each group to explain and justify their group's decisions

- We have a lot of water in this country so there is no need for us to use less water.
- People should be able to use as much water as they want.
- People in this country waste water.
- Some countries will never have enough water.
- We can't help countries where people don't have clean water.
- The amount of water there is to drink depends on how much rain there is.
- We need clean water to be healthy.
- People who pollute water should be punished.

Thanks to Gloucestershire DEC (01242 224311) for suggesting this activity which is based on an activity contained in *Clean Water: A right for all* (UNICEF)

	Knowledge and Understanding		Skills		Values and Attitudes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Social justice and equity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sense of identity and self-esteem
<input type="checkbox"/>	Diversity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ability to argue effectively	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Empathy and sense of common humanity
<input type="checkbox"/>	Globalisation and Interdependence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ability to challenge injustice & inequalities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commitment to social justice and equity
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sustainable development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Respect for people and things	<input type="checkbox"/>	Valuing and respecting diversity
<input type="checkbox"/>	Peace and conflict	<input type="checkbox"/>	Co-operation and conflict resolution	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Concern for the environment and commitment to sustainable development
				<input type="checkbox"/>	Belief that people can make a difference

<b>Who deserves the water?</b>	<b>Literacy Waste</b>	
<b>A literacy activity exploring different viewpoints over access and use of water resources</b>	<b>45 mins</b>	<b>Year 5 and 6</b>

### Suggested lesson structures

#### Suggested activity focus using the shared text

The aim of this activity is to focus on constructing effective arguments, writing a balanced report and reaching a conclusion based on available evidence, and the viewpoints expressed. It is envisioned that the activity will be delivered through two separate literacy hour lessons. The activity assumes some previous work on discussion texts and writing frameworks.

#### Writing activity details

The imaginary debate between a tobacco company manager and a Tanzanian mother presents a series of opposing views. The text should be shared with the whole class, perhaps with the teacher reading the views of the tobacco company manager and children responding with the views of the Tanzanian mother.

A white board or display chart should have a line drawn down the centre. As a whole class, the views of the tobacco company manager could be explored and written up in bullet point format on one side of the line. Children, in pairs, think of and list the main arguments of the Tanzanian mother, referring to the text. They should return in a plenary session to add their main arguments to the other side of the board/chart. The board/chart will now contain the main arguments for both the tobacco company manager and the Tanzanian mother.

Children can then use these lists to write a balanced report. A bank of suitable words and phrases for argument could be considered and displayed, e.g. *whereas, alternatively, claim, believe, are of the opinion, on the other hand* etc. The report could take the following format:

- An introduction to the theme of the report (There are different views expressed about whether tobacco farming is good or bad for people living near tobacco farms in African countries. One such country is Tanzania...)
- The views expressed by one side (The tobacco company defend their action by claiming that.... They also argue that...etc.)
- The views expressed by the other side (The Tanzanian mother however believes that.... She also says that...etc.)
- A conclusion based on the evidence and the different views expressed (*After looking at the evidence and different view points I think..... because....*)

#### Shared text: identifying key ideas

An imaginary debate between a tobacco company manager and a Tanzanian mother

**Tobacco manager:** It is all too easy just to say that growing tobacco is bad. Children in Britain could get the wrong idea about what is going on

**Mother:** It is bad, that's all there is to it. Look where they've burnt the trees to make room for tobacco fields. That means less water under the ground. Then a load of it gets wasted watering those useless tobacco plants. We end up with no water for drinking and growing our own food

**Tobacco manager:** I don't think 'useless' is right. What people need is money. That way they can buy food and pay for water pumps in their villages. Growing tobacco gives them that money.

**Mother:** Oh, you make it sound so wonderful. The rubbish wages you pay aren't enough to buy those things. Give us soil and water, then we can grow our own food, and not waste money paying someone else for it.

**Tobacco manager:** What we do makes jobs for people. When people have work they can change their lives. I know that some of the men where you live can now spend their money on new things.

**Mother:** Useless things, like cigarettes, you mean. There are more than enough jobs already - growing the food, fetch the water, make a life for the children. Your jobs don't help. When the soil's no good any more, you'll clear off somewhere else.

**Tobacco manager:** Thousands and thousands of people around the world have jobs because of tobacco. It would be wrong to take those jobs away by not growing it.

**Mother:** I can't help that. All I know is that people here are left without clean water, just so you can make a fortune out of something that kills smokers all over the world. You should be ashamed.

**Tobacco manager:** If people want to smoke they must be allowed to. It is not for you or I to say people cannot smoke. As for water it sounds as if tobacco fields are to blame for everything that goes wrong in your village.

**Mother:** No, not everything, but growing tobacco doesn't help the mess we're in. It's time people here came together to agree on what we really need. They should go for a handpump; clean water, never mind anything else. Children in Britain will know what I mean.

**Tobacco manager:** I hope that children in Britain will look at the arguments for themselves. I wish the village luck, but I ask them to remember that Tanzania needs to make more money to build roads, houses, factories and hospitals. Making more money means selling things like tobacco to rich countries. It's the way things are.

### Further activity

#### The River's story - by Brian Patten

I remember when life was good.  
I shilly-shallied across meadows,  
Tumbled down mountains,  
I laughed and gurgled through woods,  
Stretched and yawned in a myriad of floods.  
Insects, weightless as sunbeams,  
Settled upon my skin to drink.  
I wore lily-pads like medals.  
Fish, lazy and battle scared,  
Gossiped beneath them,  
The damselflies were my ballerinas,  
The pink my ambassadors.  
Kingfishers, disguised as rainbows,  
Were my secret agents.  
It was a sweet time, a gone-time,  
A time before factories grew,  
Brick by greedy brick,  
And left me cowering  
In monstrous shadows.  
Like drunken giants  
They vomited their poisons into me.  
Tonight a scattering of vagrant bluebells,  
Dwarfed by those same poisons,  
Toll my ending.

Children, come and find me if you wish,  
I am your inheritance.  
Behind the derelict housing-estates  
You will discover my remnants.  
Clogged with garbage and junk,  
To an open sewer I've shrunk.

I, who have flowed through history,  
 Who have seen hamlets become villages,  
 Villages become towns, towns become cities,  
 Am reduced to a trickle of filth  
 Beneath the still, burning stars

*Taken from WaterLiteracy, a resource for the literacy hour, produced by WaterAid*

### Activity ideas based on the poem

This poem would be an appropriate text for exploring the use of figurative language in poetry and analysing how messages, moods, feelings and attitudes are conveyed in poetry. It provides a powerful text for discussion and interpretation.

Questions which might be discussed using this poem:

- What is the author's intention? What is his message and attitude?
- What words or phrases has the author chosen to create mood and feeling?
- Analyse some phrases and discuss how they might be interpreted

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