When Water Runs Low

Scarcity, work, and shared choices in the Colorado River region

7.C.2.4 "Identify examples of scarcity and how the availability of natural resources impacts regional economies, potentially leading to both conflict and cooperation."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two signs that river water is scarce, circle two ways its availability affects work or businesses, and number one example of conflict and one example of cooperation. Use your marks to trace how a limited resource affects the region.

Sharing the Colorado River

1 Every spring, snow that melts in the Rocky Mountains helps fill the Colorado River. The river supplies water to parts of seven U.S. states and Mexico, but the Southwest is dry. When heat and drought reduce the river's flow, there may not be enough water for every planned use. This is scarcity: people want more of a resource than is available. Reservoirs store water for dry periods, yet low river flows can leave them partly empty. Less stored water makes future shortages harder to manage.

2 In California's Imperial Valley, farmers use Colorado River water to grow crops such as lettuce and alfalfa. Farm work and businesses that pack and ship crops depend on reliable water supplies. Farther upstream, cities in the Southwest also need river water for homes and businesses. If water deliveries shrink, farms may plant less, and some businesses may need to change how they operate. These economic effects can spread beyond one farm or city. People disagree about which users should make the biggest cuts when water is scarce.

3 Disagreements can turn into conflict when states, farms, and cities argue over who should reduce water use. Yet the same shortage can lead to cooperation. In 2023, Arizona, California, and Nevada proposed temporary cuts in their use of Colorado River water, with federal support. Their plan aimed to keep more water in major reservoirs. Farmers and cities can also save water by changing irrigation methods or repairing leaks. Such steps cannot create rain, but shared plans can reduce pressure on water supplies and protect regional jobs.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What two details show that Colorado River water can be scarce?

2. How could less river water affect both farms and other businesses in the Imperial Valley?

3. Why could a shortage cause conflict among states, farms, and cities?

4. What did three states propose in 2023, and how was their plan meant to help?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent a region where a natural resource other than river water has become scarce. In five sentences, explain how the shortage affects two kinds of local work or business, describe one conflict it could cause, and propose one way people could cooperate.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 7 · 7.C.2.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two signs that river water is scarce, circle two ways its availability affects work or businesses, and number one example of conflict and one example of cooperation. Use your marks to trace how a limited resource affects the region. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What two details show that Colorado River water can be scarce?	**Heat and drought can reduce the river's flow, leaving too little water for every planned use. Low flows can also leave reservoirs partly empty.**
2	How could less river water affect both farms and other businesses in the Imperial Valley?	**Farms may plant fewer crops. Businesses that pack and ship those crops would then have less work.**
3	Why could a shortage cause conflict among states, farms, and cities?	**They all use river water and may disagree about who should make the biggest cuts.**
4	What did three states propose in 2023, and how was their plan meant to help?	**Arizona, California, and Nevada proposed temporary cuts in water use to keep more water in major reservoirs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

On a rocky coast, fewer fish are available after several poor breeding seasons. Fishing crews have smaller catches, so the town's seafood plant has less work for its employees. Crews argue over where they may fish because each needs enough fish to earn money. They agree to limit the number of fish each boat takes and protect breeding areas. Those shared rules could help the fish population recover and keep local jobs in the future.

Accept other passage-supported signs of scarcity and economic effects. For the open task, look for a resource other than river water, effects on two kinds of work or business, a plausible conflict, and a cooperative response.