Who Gets Water?

Trace decisions and weigh their effects along the Colorado River.

OKH.P.2.3.C "Evaluate the extent to which political and economic decisions have had significant impact on human and physical environments of various places and regions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline decisions about sharing or using river water, circle their effects on people, and number their effects on the physical environment. Use your marks to judge which effects were most significant.

One River, Different Outcomes

1 The Colorado River crosses dry parts of the United States and Mexico, where its water supports cities, farms, and wildlife. In 1922, seven U.S. states signed the Colorado River Compact. It divided the river's water between the upper and lower basins, but it did not set aside water for Mexico. Later, the federal government built Hoover Dam, completed in 1936, to store water and generate electricity. Its reservoir helped make water supplies more dependable for growing communities downstream. The dam also changed the river itself: water slowed behind it, and much of the sediment the river once carried settled in the reservoir.

2 Water stored and diverted along the river helped farmers grow crops in California's Imperial Valley. Irrigated fields supported farm work in a place with little rainfall. Cities, including Las Vegas, also drew on the river as they grew. In 1944, the United States and Mexico signed a treaty that allotted Mexico a share of Colorado River water. Yet dams and diversions throughout the basin left far less water flowing through the river's delta in Mexico. Wetlands shrank, and plants and animals that depended on regular river flows lost habitat. Benefits in one place came with costs in another.

3 In 2012, the two countries agreed to test a different use of the river. Their agreement allowed a limited release of water for the delta. A 2014 release sent water down stretches of riverbed that were usually dry, and vegetation recovered in some areas. But the brief release did not restore steady flows across the whole delta. Earlier decisions to store and divert water had shaped farms, cities, and habitats for decades. The later agreement showed that policy could improve some damaged places, while also showing how hard it was to reverse changes made across an entire river basin.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How significant were Hoover Dam's effects on both downstream communities and the river's physical environment? Use one detail for each.

2. Compare the effects of storing and diverting water on the Imperial Valley and Mexico's delta. Who benefited, and what changed in the physical environment?

3. To what extent did the 1944 treaty prevent environmental harm in Mexico's delta? Support your judgment with passage evidence.

4. How did the scale of the 2014 water release's effects compare with the effects of earlier decisions to store and divert water?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Propose a new rule for sharing Colorado River water between Imperial Valley farms and Mexico's delta. Predict an effect on people in one place and an effect on the physical environment in the other, then judge whether the benefits would outweigh the costs using passage evidence.

ANSWER KEY

Who Gets Water?

HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.P.2.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline decisions about sharing or using river water, circle their effects on people, and number their effects on the physical environment. Use your marks to judge which effects were most significant. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How significant were Hoover Dam's effects on both downstream communities and the river's physical environment? Use one detail for each.	**Its effects were significant: stored water made supplies more dependable for downstream communities, while the reservoir slowed the river and trapped much of its sediment.**
2	Compare the effects of storing and diverting water on the Imperial Valley and Mexico's delta. Who benefited, and what changed in the physical environment?	**Imperial Valley farmers benefited from irrigation that supported crops and farm work. Far less water reached Mexico's delta, where wetlands shrank and habitat was lost.**
3	To what extent did the 1944 treaty prevent environmental harm in Mexico's delta? Support your judgment with passage evidence.	**It did not prevent major harm. Although the treaty allotted Mexico water, dams and diversions throughout the basin left far less water flowing through the delta, and wetlands shrank.**
4	How did the scale of the 2014 water release's effects compare with the effects of earlier decisions to store and divert water?	**The release helped vegetation recover in some areas, but it did not restore steady flows across the delta. Earlier storage and diversion decisions shaped farms, cities, and habitats for decades.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would require a small, regular flow of water into Mexico's delta, even in years when Imperial Valley farms need irrigation. Farm workers might have less work if reduced irrigation meant fewer crops. In the delta, a regular flow could help wetlands and the plants and animals that depend on them. I think the benefits could outweigh the costs if the reduction for farms were small. The passage shows that irrigation supports farm work, so the rule must protect farms too. It also shows that a brief release helped some vegetation but did not restore steady flows.

Accept supported judgments that distinguish effects on people from effects on the river, wetlands, or habitat. For Part 3, students may favor a different sharing rule if they predict effects in both places and weigh a benefit against a cost using passage evidence.