

Sharing a Shrinking River

Analyze conflicts and cooperation over a shared water source.

WG.17.c “analyzing the types of conflicts and cooperation that can occur over the use of rivers and bodies of water.”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each statement that shows a conflict and circle each statement that shows cooperation, so you can compare how water users compete and work together.

The Colorado River

- ① The Colorado River supplies water to seven U.S. states, Mexico, farms, cities, and tribal nations. In 1922, the Colorado River Compact divided much of the river’s water between an Upper Basin group and a Lower Basin group. The agreement was based on river-flow estimates from unusually wet years. As population grew and long drought reduced flow, the promised amounts became harder to deliver. A state that receives less water may argue that another state should use less.
- ② Conflicts can also occur within a state. Farmers may need water to irrigate crops, while growing cities need water for homes and businesses. River water is also needed for fish habitat and recreation. When reservoirs are low, officials must decide which uses face cuts. These choices can create conflict because each group depends on water differently. For example, cutting water for farms can reduce harvests, while cutting city supplies can limit new housing and raise costs.
- ③ Cooperation does not mean every group gets everything it wants. It means people negotiate rules and share the burden of shortages. In 2023, California, Arizona, and Nevada agreed to conserve Colorado River water in exchange for federal funding to improve efficiency. The 1944 Water Treaty also created a way for the United States and Mexico to manage shared river water. Communities can cooperate by repairing leaky canals, using water-saving irrigation, and meeting to plan for dry years. Such steps reduce waste, but they do not remove the need for fair decisions.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Why did the water amounts promised in the 1922 Colorado River Compact become harder to deliver?

2 Describe one conflict over Colorado River water from the passage. Name the groups or uses that compete.

3 How was the 2023 agreement among California, Arizona, and Nevada an example of cooperation?

4 Why can cooperation reduce water problems without ending all conflict?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Create a four-sentence proposal for a fictional lake shared by a town and a farming community. Explain the conflict, name both water needs, and describe one cooperative plan that includes a tradeoff for each group.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each statement that shows a conflict and circle each statement that shows cooperation, so you can compare how water users compete and work together. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the water amounts promised in the 1922 Colorado River Compact become harder to deliver?	The agreement used estimates from unusually wet years, but population grew and long drought reduced the river's flow.
2	Describe one conflict over Colorado River water from the passage. Name the groups or uses that compete.	Answers may identify states competing for water, or farmers competing with cities, fish habitat, or recreation for limited water.
3	How was the 2023 agreement among California, Arizona, and Nevada an example of cooperation?	The states agreed to conserve Colorado River water and received federal funding to improve water-use efficiency.
4	Why can cooperation reduce water problems without ending all conflict?	Cooperation can reduce waste and share shortages, but groups still must make fair decisions because they have different water needs.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Lake Cedar is shared by Pine Town and the nearby Willow Farm Cooperative. Pine Town wants more water for new homes, while the farmers need water for vegetable fields. They could set a drought schedule that limits lawn watering in town and funds drip irrigation on the farms. Both groups would give up some water use, but the plan would protect homes, crops, and the lake.

Accept equivalent explanations that identify competing users, limited water, and a specific cooperative action. For the open response, look for four sentences that include both groups' needs and a realistic tradeoff in the proposed plan.