

Water & Language Arts

Overview

Water is an essential element to human life. Given its importance, it is not surprising that water is intimately connected to culture. Examining language, religion and literature allow us to better understand how different cultures view water and how water has impacted the development of cultures throughout history.

Water and Literature

Given the importance of water to life, it is not surprising that it is also a potent symbol in many pieces of literature.

“Water, the fountainhead of civilization as of life, flows through human expression through the ages. Water flows through literature. There is the recurring motif of yearning for rain as the farmer looks at his sun-baked field and his hungry family. There is the intimate relationship of an individual or a community with a particular river or sea. But water in literature is also as a persona larger than a single entity. There is the beneficent life-giver, the nurturing mother-river in stories of fishing villages, and people who live off the sea or river as others live off the forest.”

- Githa Hariharan

- What is the significance of water in the poems or novels you are reading in class? What can this tell us about the significance or value of water to the characters or culture being depicted?

Water and Culture

The ways in which water is perceived and used differ greatly across cultures. Culture is also influenced greatly by geographical location and access to water. Water is not perceived the same way in Africa as it is in Asia or in Australia as it is in the Amazon. The role that water plays in shaping the lives of people can be seen in the huge variety of water-related religious practices, spiritual beliefs, myths, legends and management practices throughout the world.

- What are some different cultural rituals or traditions involving water?
- If water is such an important element of life and symbolic part of so many cultures, why is water also so polluted in many places? What might be done to prevent or reverse this pollution?

Language

Not only does every language have a word for water, but it also appears in hundreds of proverbs, metaphors and symbols, throughout the world. The use of the word 'water' in language shows the enormous breadth of ideas associated with the resource throughout the world and the even larger variety of ways in which water is valued in different cultures and civilizations

- Are there languages with more than one word for water? What does this tell us about the role of water in this culture?
- What do these water proverbs tell us about the role or view of water in these cultures?

Dirty water cannot be washed (Africa)

Just because the tree trunk rests for a while in water does not make it a crocodile (Africa)

In the desert, any water will do (Arab States)

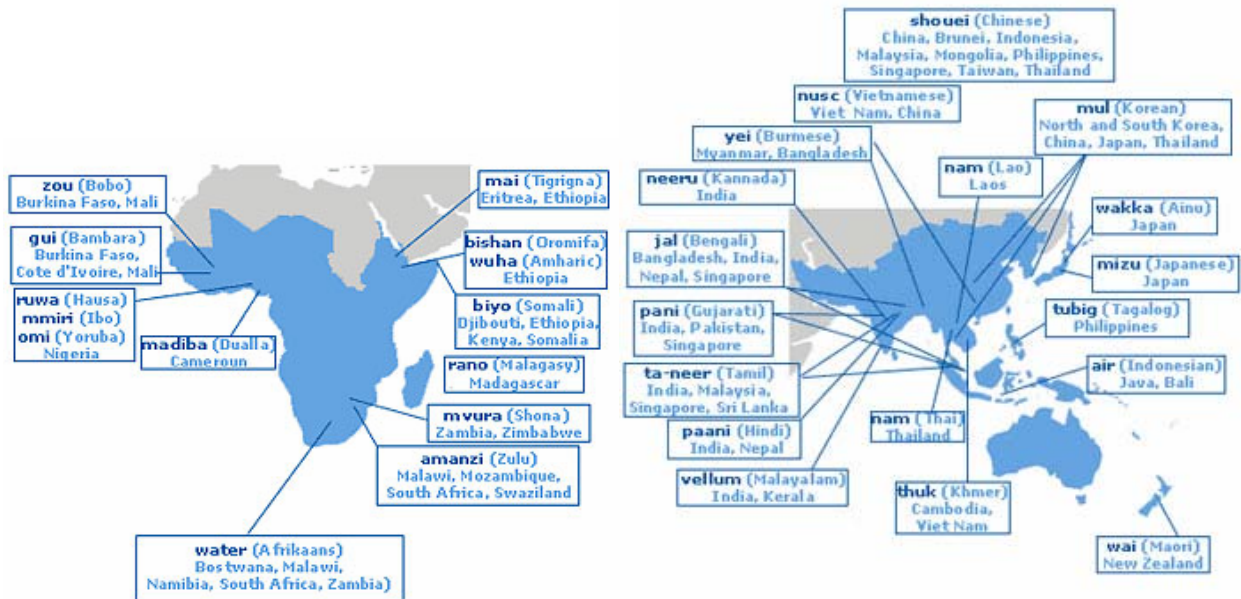
When drinking from the well, do not forget those who dug it (Asia)

We do not know the worth of water until the well is dry (Europe)

Still waters run deep (Europe)

- *Water Vocabulary*

Review the words in the glossary and learn their meaning, spelling, origins



Religion

Water is an essential part of most spiritual beliefs and religious traditions. The diverse religious and cultural aspects of water reflect the vast array of civilizations that have made water the central element in their practices.

- Why is water such a significant part of so many of the world's religions?
- How might the pollution of water impact or be impacted by its spiritual significance?
i.e. The Ganges River in India

Language Arts Skills

Reading Comprehension

Read articles from any of the issue briefings and answer questions about the article and the author's perspective.

Writing

Technical Writing

Compose a letter to a city councilman, state senator, congressman or another elected official about a water-related issue in your community.

Creative Writing

Think about what your life would be like without adequate access to water and write a poem or narrative story about how that might look and feel.

Analytical Writing

Read articles from any of the issue briefings and analyze the argument provided by the author in a short essay.

Public Speaking

Develop a presentation on an issue related to water.

Media Literacy

Identify bias in the media by reading several articles on water and identifying the viewpoints that are offered and whether the facts support the argument. (ie water privatization)

Active Listening & note taking

Watch other student presentations on water, take notes and think of at least one question you would ask them about their presentation. Can also be done with a movie or speaker.

Lesson Plans

A Sense of Water

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/enrichment/africa/lessons/MSlang01/index.html>

Grades: 6–8

Students discover how the need for water can be felt, seen, and heard in the song, voice, craft, religion, and ritual of a culture. They capture this "sense of water" in a narrative poem.

The Flow of Women's Work

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/enrichment/africa/lessons/MSgeog02/index.html>

Grades: 6–8

Students compare the division of labor around water-related work in their own homes to families in rural Lesotho to gain an understanding of the multiple factors influencing the formation of gender roles.

Water: Source of Health, Source of Illness

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/enrichment/africa/lessons/MShealth01/index.html>

Grades: 6–8

Students examine the connections between water and disease in four West African countries and devise a strategy to fight one waterborne illness in rural Africa.

Narrative vs. Expository Texts

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/enrichment/africa/lessons/HSlang01/index.html>

Grades: 9–12

Written for students with limited English language skills, this unit uses the vignettes from Peace Corps Volunteers to compare expository and narrative texts. Students write essays of both types.

Narrative Cartoons

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/educators/enrichment/africa/lessons/HSart02/index.html>

Grades: 9–12

Based on essays and photos provided by Peace Corps Volunteers, students create narrative cartoons that illustrate the lives of young people in an African country.

Water: A Source of Life and Culture

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/educators/enrichment/africa/lessons/HSart01/index.html>

Grades: 9–12

Students research and analyze the role of water in daily life, and create symbols to represent their findings. The students' symbols are arranged to create a contemporary work of art.

The Global Water Sampling Project

<http://www.ciese.org/curriculum/waterproj/languageactivities.shtml>

Students assess the water quality in their community and compose a letter to a congressperson regarding water quality issues.

Online Resources

Water in Religion

<http://www.africanwater.org/religion.htm>

This website offers a description of the role of water in many different faith traditions, including Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Shinto and Zoroastrianism.

UNESCO: Water and Culture

http://www.unesco.org/water/wwd2006/world_views/index.shtml

This site offers information about water and cultures around the world and explores water in language, myth, religion, etc. Use the navigation bar on the right to access pages with more detail on each of these topics.

Articles

Water in Literature

Times Online: London, England – July 18, 2008

http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article4356560.ece

Includes analysis of religious stories, poetry and novels in which water plays a central role or is a central metaphor.

The Shores of Literature

The Telegraph: Calcutta India – April 10, 2005

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050410/asp/opinion/story_4598029.asp

An article on water in literature from the perspective of the Indian writer, Githa Hariharan.

Water for Profit

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/features/water/>



World Savvy

A look at the privatization of water. An excellent resource for students to explore different arguments for and against water privatization and analyze the arguments.

Videos

Ganga Ma- Mother Ganges

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVgqcZl-c6g>

Portrait of the importance of the Ganges River in Hindu tradition and the pollution that has resulted from its overuse.