

Graphic Organizer: English III: Reading: Module 2: Lesson 2: Section 3: Drawing Conclusions: Excerpt #2

Directions: Read the article and answer the questions on page 3.

This article from National Geographic was published on their Web site on January 18, 2013.

Drought Fuels Water War Between Texas and New Mexico*

As climate change alters rainfall patterns and river flows, tensions are bound to rise between states and countries that share rivers that cross their borders.

Texas, suffering through a devastating drought, filed a lawsuit with the U.S. Supreme Court alleging that New Mexico is failing to live up to its water delivery commitments under the 1938 Rio Grande Compact.

Texas charges that New Mexico's pumping of groundwater in the region below Elephant Butte Dam to the New Mexico-Texas border is reducing Rio Grande flows into Texas, thereby depriving the state's farms and cities of water they are legally entitled to under the Compact.

New Mexico officials have consistently maintained that the state is sending to Texas all the Rio Grande water to which it is legally entitled. The state attorney general said in a recent statement that Texas is "trying to rustle New Mexico's water . . . while destroying water resources for hundreds of thousands of New Mexicans."

Fighting words, to be sure.

According to an article on the impacts of groundwater pumping in the Rio Grande Basin published in . . . Ecosphere, a journal of the Ecological Society of America, during the 2004 drought, . . . pumping from the Messila Aquifer rose to twice the long-term average. . . .

But how much this pumping has affected flows into Texas is in question. . . .

To avoid an escalating legal fight, the federal Bureau of Reclamation, which operates Elephant Butte, worked out an agreement with two irrigation districts in Texas and New Mexico to give Texas more river water to make up for New Mexico's groundwater use. . . .

[T]hree years later the state [of New Mexico] filed suit against the Bureau, charging that the deal gave away too much of New Mexico's Rio Grande allotment to Texas and would cause \$183 million in damages to the state's agricultural economy.

Texas shot back with the lawsuit filed last week.

Meanwhile, the drought persists. Elephant Butte is at 8 percent of its storage capacity. . . .

[W]hile the Supreme Court may ultimately decide this Texas-sized water dispute, even the highest court in the land can't dictate Mother Nature to deliver more water.

Sandra Postel is director of the Global Water Policy Project and Freshwater Fellow of the National Geographic Society. She is the author of several acclaimed books, including the award-winning Last Oasis, a Pew Scholar in Conservation and the Environment, and one of the "Scientific American 50."

*In compliance with National Geographic's policies regarding Educational Use of Content, this PDF must not be posted or uploaded to websites outside of ProjectShareTexas.org.

Continue to
page 2 for
Excerpt #3

**Graphic Organizer: English III: Reading: Module 2: Lesson 2: Section 3:
Drawing Conclusions: Excerpt #3** (continued, page 2)

This article comes from the U.S. Water Alliance, a nonprofit group that seeks to raise “public awareness [and] that advances holistic, watershed-based approaches to water quality and quantity challenges.” The article was published on their Web site on February 8, 2013.

Texas vs. New Mexico: the Water War

This month, Texas asked the U.S. Supreme Court to hear its complaint that New Mexico has been diverting water from the Rio Grande it is obligated to send downstream under a 75-year-old agreement called the Rio Grande Compact. The compact among Colorado, New Mexico and Texas settled years of litigation by establishing a formula for allocating the river’s water to various users.

A system of dams and canals, called the Rio Grande Project, captures water at the Elephant Butte and Caballo reservoirs in New Mexico and delivers it to farmers in southern New Mexico and West Texas. By allowing its residents to sink nearby wells and pump water from the river, “New Mexico has changed the conditions that existed in 1938 when the compact was executed,” the Texas complaint charges. Pat Gordon, Texas’ representative on the Rio Grande Compact Commission, claims that more than 2,500 wells have been drilled below Elephant Butte since the compact was signed. The wells cause water to flow from the river into the adjoining underground aquifer, he says, reducing the amount of water available for the irrigation network.

Sarah Bond, an assistant New Mexico attorney general, denied that her state had changed its interpretation of the accounting and delivery of water under the compact.

“Southern New Mexico farmers have long turned to pumping groundwater under drought conditions, as has the nearby city of El Paso and others in Texas,” Bond said. “Those drawing water from the river have been found to have water rights that predate the Rio Grande Project,” she said. . . .

As to what happens to the river between there and Texas, New Mexico’s water law probably applies, not the compact, he says. . . .

But Carlos Rubinstein, a member of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, contends the Supreme Court should handle the dispute because the compact “is an agreement between states and it was approved by Congress.”

Should the high court decide to step in, it would probably appoint a special master (someone chosen to investigate and take evidence on behalf of the Supreme Court for ruling purposes), he says. Texas has prevailed in similar actions against New Mexico involving the Canadian and Pecos rivers, Rubinstein notes. . . .

In New Mexico, years of drought have left Elephant Butte water levels perilously low, and the mountains in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado are seeing lower-than-normal snowpack. Flow in the Rio Grande this spring is projected to be just 47% of the 1981-2010 average.

*Continue to
page 3 for
next exercise*

Directions: Use the first article (Excerpt #2) to answer the following questions. (continued, page 3)

1. Who is the author of this article? Is she an expert on water issues in the Southwest?

2. Give an example of evidence she uses in the text to support her contention that water is a serious issue in the Southwest.

3. Where is she getting her evidence?

4. Does the writer use “loaded” language?

5. What is the date of this article?

6. Explain whether you think the writer is a credible source.

Directions: Answer the questions below using both Excerpt #2 and #3. Go to next page to see sample responses.

1. Who is the author of this article? Is she an expert on water issues in the Southwest?

2. Why were you asked each time to note the date of the speech or article?

3. What are your thoughts about the water wars between Texas and New Mexico?

*Continue
to page 4
for sample
responses*

Sample Response: Excerpt #2 (continued, page 4)

1. Who is the author of this article? Is she an expert on water issues in the Southwest?

Sandra Postel is an expert on water issues. Her credentials don't mention specifically the Southwest, but she is called a "global" expert.

2. Give an example of evidence she uses in the text to support her contention that water is a serious issue in the Southwest.

Elephant Butte reservoir is at 8 percent of storage capacity. In dry times farmers have to use more groundwater than they normally would. Pumping from the Mesilla Aquifer rose to twice the long term average.

3. Where is she getting her evidence?

The journal Ecosphere and a personal visit she made to Elephant Butte among other sources.

4. Does the writer use "loaded" language?

There are only a couple of places where she uses "loaded" language, such as where she quotes New Mexican officials who say "Texas is trying to rustle their water." She says those are "fighting words." She also refers to Mother Nature at the end, pointing out that the Supreme Court doesn't have a real "say" in whether ultimately there will be more water.

5. What is the date of this article?

January 18, 2013

6. Explain whether you think the writer is a credible source.

The writer appears to be a credible source judging by her credentials that appear at the end of the article. The sources that she chooses to use are credible as well.

Sample Responses: Using both Excerpt #2 and #3:

1. Who is the author of this article? Is she an expert on water issues in the Southwest?

They both appear to be credible articles reporting on the water problems in Texas and New Mexico. We know the first article is credible because the writer has credentials that make her an expert in the field of water issues. The second article is also a credible source; however, we don't know the credentials of the person who wrote it. The second article offers us much more concrete information about the case, so it could be a helpful source also.

2. Why were you asked each time to note the date of the speech or article?

The dates are important because sometimes we can make a decision to determine the credibility of a source based on the age of the information. If it's current, then it might be a better source than something that is outdated. You'll notice that both of these articles were written at approximately the same time, so they are both timely.

3. What are your thoughts about the water wars between Texas and New Mexico?

They both make good cases for their need for water—El Paso uses lots of water, and the New Mexico farmers need it as well. I wish that they could come to some agreement without having have the Supreme Court, people who are not from the area, decide what should be done.