

Thirst

A teenage girl, a water-starved village, and the well that changed it all

Preview: This powerful story will take your students into the world of a young girl from a village in Mozambique, where she once spent many hours a day fetching water for her family.

Learning Objective: to understand the problems faced by people who do not have access to clean water and how those problems can be solved

Key Skills: author's craft, inference, problem and solution, reading for information, word choice, key ideas



Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read

Watch the video.

(15 minutes, activity sheets online)

Project or distribute the **Video Discussion Questions** for students to preview. Show our “**Behind the Scenes**” video, in which author Kristin Lewis discusses how she wrote the article and introduces some of its challenging concepts. Then answer the discussion questions as a class.

Preview vocabulary.

(5 minutes, activity online)

Project or distribute our **Vocabulary Words and Definitions** for students to refer to as they read. Highlighted words: *aquifer*, *arduous*, *developing countries*, *hygiene*, *sanitation*, *sediment*, *spectacle*. Assign the practice activity for homework.

2 Reading the Article

(45 minutes, activity sheets online)

- Give students a few minutes to preview the text

features. Then read aloud the “As You Read” box on page 6.

- Read the article once through as a class.
- Break students into groups to read the article a second time and discuss the following questions.

Close-Reading Questions

(10 minutes, activity sheets online)

- ▶ **Where in the section “A Luxury” does author Kristin Lewis speak directly to the reader? Why might she have decided to do this? (author’s craft)** *Lewis starts to speak directly to the reader with the sentence that begins “You probably don’t think twice about taking a long, refreshing shower . . .” The author may have done this to encourage readers to reflect on their own use of water and to help readers understand how different life is for those like Natalia who lack access to clean water.*
- ▶ **Lewis compares the weight of the jerry can that Natalia had to carry to that of three backpacks stuffed with books. Why do you think Lewis chose to**

include this detail? (author's craft) *Lewis included the detail to help readers understand how heavy the jerry can was. Understanding the weight of Natalia's load can help readers empathize with her.*

▶ **According to the article, why did Natalia's village need a well?**

(problem and solution, reading for information) *According to the article, Natalia's village needed a well because the only water they had to drink was not clean and often made people sick. For the women and girls of the village, fetching water was a physical hardship (they had to carry heavy jerry cans of water) that filled up several hours of every day, preventing the women and girls from doing other things, like going to school.*

▶ **Study the photograph of the children carrying water on page 7 and read the caption. What key idea of the article do the photo and caption support?** (key ideas) *The image and caption support the idea that people in many parts of the world do not have easy access to water.*

▶ **Lewis writes, "Every now and then, something will happen in the U.S. that reminds us how essential water is to our way of life." What does the word remind suggest about the availability of water in the U.S.?** (word choice, inference) *The word remind suggests that water is readily available in the U.S. We are reminded of water's importance by occasional events because water is so accessible to us that we often don't even think about how much we need and use it.*

• Bring the class back together to discuss the following questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions (5 minutes, activity sheet online)

▶ **Do you think we have a responsibility to help solve the problem of water access in other parts of the world? What could you say to someone who doesn't think so?** *In their answers to the second*

question, students might say that they could appeal to the person's sense of compassion or empathy by asking him or her to think about all of the things we use water for every day and imagine living without that water. Students might suggest telling the person how much water the average American uses each day and describing what it's like to live without access to clean water.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What role does water play in our lives?
.....

Is clean water a human right?
.....

How can access to safe water empower communities?

▶ **How do you think the way this article affects the reader would be different if it were a summary of the world's water situation in general rather than the story of**

one girl's experience? *The article would probably have less of an effect on the reader's emotions and, for many readers, be less engaging. A summary of the problem might not create as much concern for those who lack access to clean water as the story of Natalia creates; stories about individual people are easier to relate to and can generate more empathy than general information about a problem.*

▶ **On page 9, Lewis writes that people have always told stories about water. Why do you think this is the case?** *As Lewis states, "Water is life." People have always understood that without water, we cannot survive. So people have probably always been interested in water just because it's so important to us. Plus, long ago, before we had scientific knowledge of water, people were likely curious about the nature of water and made up stories as a way of trying to figure it out.*

▶ **Has reading this article changed the way you think about water and its role in your own life?**

Explain. *Answers will vary.*

3 Skill Focus: Key Ideas and Details

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Distribute the activity sheet **Water Is Life** for students to complete as homework. This activity will prepare them to respond to the writing prompt on page 9.

Differentiation

For Struggling Readers

In a well-organized paragraph, explain three ways Natalia's life changed after the well was built in her village.

For Advanced Readers

What are some of the reasons that communities around the world lack access to clean water? How can those issues be solved? Answer both questions in the form of an essay, a presentation, or a video. Use text evidence from “Thirst” and from at least two additional sources.

Complexity Factors

See how this text will challenge your students.

Purpose: Through the story of Natalia, a teen in Mozambique, “Thirst” provides information about the scarcity of clean water in many areas of the world.

Structure: Natalia’s story is chronological but is interwoven with informational passages. The text includes shifts in tense and point of view.

Language Conventionality and Clarity:

- **Vocabulary:** challenging domain-specific words (e.g., *aquifer*, *sediment*, *arduous*)
- **Figurative language:** metaphors

Knowledge Demands: The text refers to developing countries, the Norse god Odin, and water crises in various U.S. locations (West Virginia; Flint, Michigan).

Lexile: 930L

Literature Connections

Other texts that evoke the power of water:

- *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park (novel)
- *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt (novel)
- UN Resolution 64/292: The human right to water and sanitation (primary document)

ONLINE RESOURCES

VIDEO: “Behind the Scenes”

AUDIO: Hear the article read aloud.

ACTIVITIES TO PRINT OR PROJECT:

- Video Discussion Questions*
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions*
- Vocabulary*
- Water Is Life*
- Read, Think, Explain: Identifying Nonfiction Elements (two levels)
- Quiz (two levels)
- Contest Entry Form
- Core Skill: Text Evidence (two levels)
- Core Skill: Text Structure
- Core Skill: Mood

*Supports the lesson plan

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