

The water catcher

A village relies on water for its fish, but upstream, the farmers need it for their land. Who can lay claim to the water?



We often tell pupils that sharing is a virtue. But is there anything in the world you don't have to share? This could be interpreted in many ways, so begin by asking for physical objects only, and to ask them to mime holding them. Afterwards, open the floor for more abstract concepts (and how would they hold them?)



Read The Water Catcher. Keep things simple by asking for reactions. Do pupils side with the fisherman, or the farmer, or neither? This enquiry is more than a straight shoot-out between the two. There are much deeper philosophical questions lying beyond the 'who is right' poser. Encourage pupils to comment on each others' ideas, for example:

Pupil 1: I think the farmer should let the river flow downwards, because that's the way nature wants the river to flow.

Teacher: What do other people think of that? Is it wrong to change what nature has made?

Pupil 2: It is OK to change what nature has made as long as everyone gets a share of it.

Pupil 3: But who is 'everyone'? If I catch a fish, I don't have to give everyone a piece...

...and suddenly you're knee-deep in a discussion about how natures' resources should, or shouldn't be shared. This is an excellent opportunity to encourage philosophical moves, such as providing supporting evidence, posing counter-examples, and spotting assumptions. Try to highlight them as they happen, rather than reference them in advance.



Where your enquiry goes will depend on how your pupils have interpreted the stimulus. You might find them talking about the concept of ownership – *who can lay claim to a river? Or who should make the bigger compromise, those keeping to tradition, or those doing something new?*

NEXT STEPS

A Pupils could research the term 'Nubuntu' – roughly translates as 'humanity towards others'. Barack Obama spoke of Ubuntu at Nelson Mandela's funeral, as "a recognition that we are all bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others, and caring for those around us."¹

Who is showing more Ubuntu in the story? Who should show more Ubuntu?, and why?

¹ ["Obama's Tribute To Nelson Mandela At Memorial Service - Business Insider". Business Insider. 10 December 2013.](https://www.businessinsider.com/barack-obama-tribute-to-nelson-mandela-at-memorial-service-2013-12)

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The Water Catcher

The quiet fisherman lived in a house on stilts, over a river, in a forest.

There was a small village of houses just like his. Usually, the river was full of fish and life was easy. The villagers would salt and dry some of the fish to keep it so that they did not go hungry when the fish had had enough of being eaten.

Then one day, the river stopped.

It happened quite quickly. In the morning, the river was flowing as it had always done. Then the river grew slower and slower, and the water dropped lower and lower. Lost toys that had been dropped from the houses started to show up on the river banks, and the children argued over them.

By the middle of the afternoon, the only water left sat in a few puddles, full of fish flapping and squirming over each other.

A meeting was held to decide what should be done. The villagers agreed that it was quite impossible for the sea to have sucked all the water out of the river. So they decided to send someone upstream to find out what had happened. The rest would collect as many fish as they could to salt and dry, in case it took a while for the water to come back.

They argued about who to send. Should it be the strongest, the fastest, the best fighter? In the end, they sent the quiet fisherman, because this story is about him, and because he had lived with his wife for many years, and no one had ever heard them argue.

He set off up the bed of the river into the hills. There were so many stranded fish that the birds and beasts of the forest and even the flies had eaten as much as they could. The leftover fish stank in the sunshine.

He walked for many miles, and then made camp for the night. He did the same the next day, and the next. And then he came to the place where the river had been stopped. Right from one bank to the other was what looked to him like a single smooth stone, but would look to you like a concrete dam.

On the other side of the dam, the river piled up on itself and spread out over the fields on either side. Some people were walking around the dam, looking very pleased with themselves. The quiet fisherman asked one, and then another, what was going on. They just stared at him and shrugged their shoulders, until they were able to find somebody that spoke his language.

"Isn't it amazing!" the man said, beaming. He showed the fisherman how a lake of water was building behind the dam. The water from the lake would flow into channels cut into the fields, and then the crops of farmers like him would grow better than ever. All the people of the town would have plenty to eat, and more left over to sell. "Nobody in our town will ever go hungry again!" he said.

"But you have stolen our water," said the fisherman, and explained about his village and that once the salted fish had run out, they would have nothing left to eat.

"What nonsense! We haven't stolen the water, only caught it, the way you catch fish. Anyway, you can come and live with us!" said the farmer. "I used to be a fisherman too, but life here is much easier, especially now that we have water for our crops. I would never want to go back to the life you live again."

"What if the people of my village don't want to be farmers?"

"That's their problem. Surely you wouldn't expect all of us to starve so that a few of you can live miserably in your wooden huts on stilts, instead of here in stone houses that are warm in the winter? I've never heard anything so selfish and stupid."

The quiet fisherman turned and walked back towards his village, thinking as he walked.