

Water Stories

LUIS

"I'm Luis. I am 10-years-old and I live in Hunts Point, a neighborhood in the South Bronx, New York City. I live here with my family and cousins in a two bedroom apartment. I walk to school every day and to the park, where I play with my dog A-Rod. Next year, I will ride the bus like my sister and cousins. My neighborhood is surrounded by four rivers, the biggest are the Bronx River and East River. Even though they are almost right outside our door, we are not allowed to swim in the rivers or drink the water. We are not even supposed to eat the fish that come from the river, but sometimes we do. We live close to four big highways; I can see them from my window on the fifth floor. My teacher says our neighborhood was beautiful a long time ago, but now it's kind of smelly from all the garbage trucks and big factories. People who live here are trying to make it nice again."

Hunts Point was once home to beautiful country estates, but for the last 75 years industrial buildings have taken over the community; from sewage treatment plants to a giant fish market selling fish from around the world. 60,000 trucks travel through The South Bronx weekly, many to the 15 waste transfer stations and four power plants. For many years, the marshes and wetlands surrounding the Bronx were dumping grounds for construction rubble, household garbage, coal ash and other industrial waste. Sewage overflow from towns upstream and New York City can still occur, further polluting the waters. Luis's father and uncles were fishermen in Venezuela and still fish frequently at Barretto Point Park, although city health officials advise people not to eat fish caught there. Fish found in the Bronx waters often have high levels of Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), toxic chemicals that don't readily break down and have been detected as far away as the Arctic Circle in polar bears. Luis' drinking water originates in a reservoir about 125 miles away. It travels through a series of aqueducts to a water treatment center where it is filtered and disinfected. From there the water flows underground through a system of pipes—some of them more than 100-years-old—that serve Luis' neighborhood. Many South Bronx residents and community organizers are working to clean and monitor the waterways that border their neighborhood.



AJIA

"Hi! I'm Ajia and I am almost 12-years-old. I am in the Kamba tribe. I have two younger brothers, a younger sister and an older sister. We live in the Ukambani region of eastern



Kenya, where it is very hot and dry in the summer. In our mud and tin house we have no running water or electricity. My father works at a coffee plantation many kilometers away. Our small house gets very smoky from the cooking fire, which makes me cough. My father wants to build a cookhouse but wood for construction is expensive. My father and uncle did build an outside toilet, which has a hole in the ground and a tin roof. The roof protects the pit from overflowing in the rain. We are lucky to have this because most villagers do not. Sometimes during the long rains they come use our toilet. My father does not like that!"

There is a small pond in Ajia's village that fills in the rainy season, between March and May, and from which the villagers collect water. The herdsman also use the pond for their cattle and goats often contaminating the water with buckets carrying traces of animal manure. In recent summers, the pond has held increasingly less water; reducing it to a muddy puddle. Sometimes the farmers and the herders fight over the water. When the pond dries up, and the local well is dirty, villagers have to travel to other towns for water. Sometimes they even have to pay for the water. As the eldest girl, Ajia's sister is usually responsible for fetching the water and firewood, which are hard to find. Often Ajia accompanies her and they keep each other entertained during the long walk, sometimes 15 kilometers away. Occasionally they bring a wheelbarrow to carry the jerry cans (plastic water jugs), but soon, when Ajia's sister marries, she will have a donkey. During school months, Ajia's older sister stays home to help with the cooking and to watch the children. Ajia's mother tends the garden. While Ajia is at school her sister has to fetch the water by herself; sometimes she returns home in the dark, which isn't safe. Occasionally, Ajia's sister finds water that is closer, but not very clean. The family boils water for drinking, but wood for fires is scarce, so sometimes they rely on dried cow dung. Ajia is excited for her sister's wedding, but is afraid she may not be able to attend school when her sister marries, as the water carrying will now be up to her.

WATER STORIES SUPPLEMENT: WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Name:		
Grade	Age	
School Name		
School District		
City	State	Country

Water is essential to life—every living creature on Earth, from the smallest microbe to the largest mammal, depends on water. Humans rely on water for far more than just physical survival and the proper functioning of our bodies, we use water to fill everything from essential needs to extravagant wants.

Although water covers 71 percent of the planet, 98 percent of it is salty, leaving only two percent as freshwater available for human use. Most of the planet's freshwater is frozen in polar ice caps or glaciers, or trapped deep underground in water tables. Freshwater is not evenly distributed geographically; some continents and countries are considered arid, while others have abundant supply. However, water scarcity is an issue facing the entire world. Millions of families around the world live in homes without running water, household wells, or even a nearby clean water source. In the United States, even while some communities are facing flooding, major water sources such as the Colorado River and Sierra Nevada snowpack are reducing. Why? Increasing temperatures, population numbers and pollution are all contributing to a situation where humans are demanding more freshwater than the earth can regenerate. More and more available freshwater is becoming polluted, due to our ever-burgeoning population, the waste we create, and the space we require. Improper use of land may result in deforestation, erosion and runoff, which increase drainage problems and flooding.

The good news? There are solutions, lots of them. And the first step is awareness of the problem. While some solutions are simple—don't litter, use less water and teach others to do so—many are more complex, requiring dedicated attention. But first, recognize the role water plays in YOUR life. The tiny molecule that is often taken for granted, is precious to our planet. How is it precious to you?

Read Luis' and Ajia's stories. On a separate sheet of paper answer the questions to help you compile **your** own water story. We encourage you to expand on any topics that resonate with your experience. Please share your answers as we build a diverse online library of water stories from around the world. You may include your full name, or simply your first name and last initial, as well as your hometown. Photos are welcome! Some stories may be published online, but full names will not be included (only first names or pseudonyms if preferred).

Where does your water comes from?

When you turn on the faucet in your kitchen, if you have one, what is the source of that water? If you don't know, check out link at <http://water.epa.gov/drink/local/>.

What is your watershed?

(hint: <http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/index.cfm>)

How is your water is treated (filtered? decontaminated?) before it arrives at your house? http://www.epa.gov/ogwdw/wot/pdfs/book_waterontap_full.pdf

Have you ever worried your water wasn't safe to drink?

Have you ever received a warning to boil the water or not to drink the water in your community? Please explain.

Indicate what best describes your access to safe drinking water: a. Faucet is always safe to drink; b. Water sometimes or occasionally needs boiling (like after storms or during droughts); c. We have to purchase our drinking water; d. We have to walk to retrieve safe water. Please explain your response.

Describe any water shortages or droughts, in your lifetime, which affected the amount of water your household could use. Identify any restrictions or regulations that may have been put in place regarding your household or community water use, such as the timing of watering lawns or gardens, washing of cars, opening hydrants for water play, or the filling of swimming pools?

Identify the bodies of water within 10 miles of your home and provide a brief description (e.g. Atlantic Ocean, the Bronx River, Croton Reservoir, Silver Creek, or an unnamed local water source, including stream or swamp). Specify if these are freshwater or salt, manmade or natural, generally safe or polluted, etc.

Indicate ANY of the following regarding your use of those local bodies of water. We: a. drink it; b. swim or play in it; c. fish in it; d. boat in it.

Do you have a garden that requires watering?

Yes No

Do you have any native or drought-resistant plantings?

Yes No

Do you have an underground sprinkler system?

Yes No

Do you have a swimming pool? Yes No

Have you ever experienced flooding in your home or community? Explain.

Do you live near a designated wetland? Yes No

List and describe any family members that currently make or have previously made their living on the water. For example, perhaps you have an uncle who was a fisherman, your father operates boats, your sister teaches sailing etc.

List and describe any family members who make their living by doing jobs related to water use. For example, your father works at a water treatment plant, your brother works at a mill, an uncle is a farmer, or your mother works at a bottling company, swimming pool business, aquarium, plumbing supply store, etc.

Recall a negative experience that involved water. For example, a flood, a devastating drought, a capsized sailboat.

Recall a happy experience that involved a body of water. For example, a trip to a lake house, a walk along a stream, catching frogs in a marsh.

Share your water story: info@celfeducation.org

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