

# The story of a river

(What rivers used to be like)



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles



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# Caring for our environment

Matches the requirements of the Literacy Strategy and designed to integrate with your normal subject studies. (This material is independent of any specific text book and can be used alongside any publisher's books including our textbook.)

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# The story of a river

There are many ways that rivers and seas can become polluted. Sometimes we do not even realize that many of the things we do can cause pollution in rivers. Here is the story of how one river became polluted 50 years ago.

Near the source the river flowed in a valley in which farmers grew vegetables. The farmers used chemicals to help the crops grow and to keep insects away. When it rained, some of these chemicals washed off the fields and into the river.



A little further down the valley there was a pig farm. No one collected up the pig waste and so when it rained, some of this got washed into the river, too.

The floodplain near the river had meadows which were used to graze cows. The waste from the cows also washed off into the river. Where the cows trampled the bank, soil was knocked into the river, too.

Then the river ran through to a town. Not everyone who walked by the river cleared up their litter, and so some of this was tossed into the river, too. Engine oil from boats also leaked into the river.

On the edge of the town a new housing estate was built. The trees and meadow were removed, and houses, roads and pavements replaced them. When it rained there was no soil to soak up the water and it flowed quickly through drains into the river.

The drains from the town carried more rainwater into the river. This included the rubber from tyres and any odd things that were thrown into gutters.



Eventually the river reached the sea. But it was very polluted with soil, oil, rubbish and chemicals that had reached its banks as it flowed over the land. Few animals and plants lived in this river.

But since then, things have changed, and many rivers are clean enough for fish and plants again. It just goes to show that we can clean up our environment if we try.



# Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

**a** Write a sentence in which you found the word 'polluted'.

**b** From that sentence, write what you think 'polluted' means.

**c** Write a new sentence using the word 'polluted'.

**d** Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'polluted'.

**e** Give some examples of different kinds of 'pollution'.





# Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: begins	starts

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# Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence.  
e.g. "This story tells us..."

3 Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

**Finally,  
can you rewrite your  
summary to make it better?**

1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.
2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.
3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.
4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?

There is nothing wrong with rewriting; even the best authors rewrite their work.



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# Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.



In towns, rubbish was thrown into rivers.

The river is much cleaner today.

Pesticides and other chemicals flowed into rivers with rainwater.

The story of the polluted river was 50 years ago.

In the past people used to let slurry flow into rivers.



# Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.



1 When was the story of the river?

2 Where did oil get into the river?

3 How many fish and plants lived in the river?

4 What happened to the pollution at the river mouth?





# Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.

1 Why were there chemicals in the river?

2 Why did rubbish get into the river?

3 How is building new houses bad for the river?

4 Why do you think things have changed in the last 50 years?



# Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.



1 Would you have liked to live next to this river?

2 Do you think you would have noticed river pollution 50 years ago?

3 Does it matter that fish and plants are back in many rivers?

4 Do you think people are more worried about pollution today than in the past?

5 What would be the best way to clean up rivers: government laws or the way people behave, or both?





# Talking it through

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



**Discussion topic: River pollution**

Which do you think is the most difficult to clean up: rubbish or chemicals that leak into the river?



# Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.



## Clean-up campaign

You know that many rivers are being cleaned up, but the one in your town is not. Write a story about of how you would get something to happen.



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