

Water & Gratitude

	Water and Gratitude Lesson Plan
Length	60-90 minutes
Materials Required	For workshop: Video or audio clip of water flowing in Big Thompson river; video clips of Sharon Carlisle, still photos of paper soaking in Big Thompson river; copies of Neruda, Oliver and “Nibi” poems Video interview with Sharon Carlisle in Loveland, Colorado (see Writing Water website for YouTube link) For next time: soaked paper for writing & paper for soaking
Lesson Focus	Gratitude & Water
Learning Goals - Writing	Practice freewriting in response to visual images and sound. Experiment with different genres: short letters, free verse poetry, prose. Advance comfort level with group sharing of draft work. Participate in informal response to peers’ writing.
Learning Goal – Water	Reflect on relationship between personal life and water through gratitude exercises; learn about clean water as basic human right, physical need, and social and material commodity. Think about natural, free-flowing water, what it means to us, what it means to plants and animals that call it home, and what it means to the future of the Earth.
Target Outcomes	To deepen writers’ understanding of their relationship to water, the role of water in their histories and the history of the Earth, and the global import of access to clean water. These outcomes are met through the varied writing exercises focused on water and gratitude.
Target Audience	Writers participating in community workshops, especially those who are unable to easily visit natural waterways due to current life circumstances.

<p>Warm-up Mindful Moment (10 mins)</p>	<p>Let's take a moment to focus. Listen to this clip of water from the Big Thompson river in late summer 2021. As you listen, write about a time you were grateful for water. What emotions come up when you hear flowing water.</p>
<p>Writing Prompt #1 (15-20 mins)</p>	<p>Opening discussion about water & gratitude with installation artist, Sharon Carlisle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduce Sharon and her artwork through her “Speaking of Water” project by watching a clip from her video interview. Encourage writers to take notes on what they hear Sharon talking about as they listen. Model on the white board if possible by recording ideas and phrases that the group can discuss after. ● Ask writers to write a response for a few moments after the video to record their thoughts and reflect on the notes they took. ● Invite their reflections and open a discussion on the theme of gratitude and water. ● Share a few images from the river of the paper soaking and hanging to dry. Share a few images that demonstrate the role of water in each step it takes to make paper: water is required for a seed to germinate, water is required for a tree to grow, water is required to make paper (https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/wsp1330A#:~:text=Water%2C%20of%20varied%20qualities%2C%20is,the%20woodpulp%2C%20and%20the%20machines). Water is also needed to make art supplies: paints (https://www.resene.co.nz/whatispaint.htm), inks (https://sciencing.com/ink-made-6635280.html), wood brushes. ● Share a piece of paper with each writer and ask them to compose a “Dear Water” letter of gratitude. ● Write for 7 minutes (or more), then invite writers to share and response to each others’ work.
<p>Writing Prompt #2 (10 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read or listen to “At Blackwater Pond” by Mary Oliver. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgKuLMyblfo) ● Think about a time you were thirsty. What quenched your thirst (literal or metaphoric)? Think about a moment when you paused to reflect, as Oliver did, on “that beautiful thing that just happened,” when you experienced a moment of gratitude. Tell us about it. ● Write for 5-7 minutes. Then share.
<p>Writing Prompt</p>	<p>Global connection: gratitude for clean water - not just necessary for drinking water.</p>

<p>#3 (15 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share this organization with the writers: https://wellawareworld.org/about ● Mission: “Well Aware is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that funds and implements sustainable clean water systems to drive economic development and empower communities in East Africa.” ● Watch short gratitude chant or look at photo: https://wellawareworld.org/blog/gratitude-for-clean-water ● Print and cut into individual cards, the people featured on the “faces of water” page: https://wellawareworld.org/faces-of-water. Give each writer one biographical card to read and respond to. Share a few of the bio cards out loud. ● How come we have clean water in most places in the United States? Enter the Clean Water Act (circa 1948 and 1972) (https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/history-clean-water-act): the EPA regulates discharge of pollutants into bodies of water. This keeps our waters clean for drinking, but also for ecosystems and recreation. The EPA also uses science to determine how much a pollutant is “too much” - water quality standards. Rivers used to catch on fire (https://www.history.com/news/epa-earth-day-cleveland-cuyahoga-river-fire-clean-water-act)! ● 7 minute freewrite with these sentence stems: “Without clean water...” “Water allows me” “Water...” “Access to clean water gives me...” “I am grateful for water quality standards...”
<p>Writing Prompt #4 (15 mins)</p>	<p>Read “Nibi,” a poem from the Ojibwa oral tradition. Think about the focus on water as sacred, as life-giving and humans as keepers of water. Write a response to these ideas in the form of a poem, story, narrative, or freewrite. Writing for 10 minutes and invite writers to share their work.</p>
<p>Wrap-Up</p>	<p>Wrap-up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask writers which of these pieces was their favorite to work on and have a few share their responses. ● Invite writers to keep working on any of these draft pieces. ● Invite submission of drafts for feedback or for publication (marked with “p”). <p>For next time: Three possible ideas for writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Take another piece of the paper soaked in the Big Thompson river and write about a time you felt gratitude for water in the natural world. You could extend one of the pieces you began today, if you like.

- Take a plain piece of brown paper and soak it wherever you have access to water. Let it dry and make some notes on the experience and perhaps how water is intersecting with your life right now in this place.
- Research the idea of a dry waterfall and write about the absence of water. What does a dry waterfall mean - regionally and seasonally? How might we take up the Japanese technique of creating “kare-taki” or dry cascades to consider meditation and gratitude for water. The amazing slot canyons of the southwest - dry spaces that have seasonal (or longer periods of time) intense floods and rushing, roaring water (<https://www.visitutah.com/things-to-do/slot-canyons>). Think about the idea that water leaves a mark even when it isn't there: carving canyons, waterfalls, pools. The idea that the patterns and formations that water makes can both intone energy and relaxation: energy in the form of falling, carving, splashing; and relaxation in the form of ripples, pools, waves.

“At Blackwater Pond” by Mary Oliver

Source: <https://www.poeticous.com/mary-oliver/at-blackwater-pond>

At Blackwater Pond the tossed waters have settled
after a night of rain.
I dip my cupped hands. I drink
a long time. It tastes
like stone, leaves, fire. It falls cold
into my body, waking the bones. I hear them
deep inside me, whispering
oh what is that beautiful thing
that just happened?

“Nibi” from Ojibwe Oral Tradition

Source: <https://www.aaanativearts.com/ojibwa-poem-nibi-water>

Anishinaabekwe, the Daughters,
You are the keepers of the water.

I am Nibi... water.. the sacred source, the blood of Aki, Mother Earth, the force filling dry seeds to great bursting.

I am the wombs cradle.
I purify.

Nibi, the lifegiver, forever the Circle’s charge I have coursed through our Mother’s veins.

Now hear my sorrow and my pain in the river’s rush, the rain.
I am your grandchildren’s drink. Listen, Daughters, always.

You are the keepers of the water. Hear my cry, for the springs flow darkly now through the heart of Aki.

This lesson plan is free to download and use. The Writing Water Curriculum Project (WWCP) was developed in 2021-2022 with support from The Colorado Water Center at Colorado State University and in collaboration with interns at the Community Literacy Center. Special thanks to Emily Iskin, our graduate research assistant and expert in fluvial geomorphology, who provided essential consultation in water science and created original water-inspired art for the WWCP webpage.