

## Water Classroom 2-1 (version 2)

### Water Values and Cultural Practices

#### Teaching plan for learning on water for middle school students

Under a project initiated by the Living Waters Museum, Centre for Water Research, IISER Pune and  
Research and supported by Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures, IIHS, Bangalore

#### 2-1-1 Proposed plan

Lesson Plan number	WC-2-1
Topic	Water Values and Cultural Practices
Discipline	Social studies
Time	100 minutes (can be split into multiple sessions)
Prior learning	Students may be given some sections of the 'Background content for the facilitator/educator' as prior reading. Students may be given the book Paani Party as prior reading.
Learning objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Students are introduced to the importance of valuing water.</li><li>● Students discuss and <i>analyse</i> different values concerning water or reasons for valuing water and how they shape our relationship with water at multiple levels</li><li>● Students reflect on the significance of water, culture and faith in their own lives and provide examples to <i>illustrate</i> how cultural beliefs and practices can be used to motivate action.</li></ul>
Learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Students are able to <i>distinguish</i> different values concerning water or reasons for valuing water and <i>evaluate</i> their importance in their lives</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are able to <i>identify</i> at least one action that they would like to implement towards building respect for and valuing water</li> </ul>
Resources/materials	<p>Image for water practices can be found in a file named WC-2-1-Water-Practices-Images-v2</p> <p>Book-Paani Party, Printed cards for each group, powerpoint presentation, projector, whiteboard, marker pens</p>
Use of teaching time	<p><b>5 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator introduces the session.</p> <p>They begin by explaining that people value water in many different ways. “We are going to discuss some different ways in which we value water and learn about some practices that we follow related to water in this session.”</p> <p><b>10-15 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator introduces students to water practices by choosing one of the following activities</p> <p>i. read the story book – Paani Party by Minaz Ansari and Priyanka Lele aloud. The book pages can be displayed digitally on a screen during the reading, so students can read along.</p> <p>The book can be accessed at -  <a href="https://issuu.com/livingwatersmuseum/docs/pani_party">https://issuu.com/livingwatersmuseum/docs/pani_party</a></p> <p>After the book reading, conduct activity WC-2-1- Activity -I</p> <p>OR</p>

	<p>ii. Conduct WC-2-1- Activity -I and WC-2-1- Activity-II consecutively.</p> <p><b>5-10 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator can then either have students share their thoughts around their own table or go around the room and ask each table to share a few thoughts - random selection.</p> <p><i>For discussion, facilitator/educator may refer to – Background content for facilitator/educator – sections 2-1-2a-b.</i></p> <p><b>10-15 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator talks to students about hydrophilanthropy and asks if they have seen similar heritage or experienced something similar. Slides showing examples of hydro philanthropy can be shared on the screen. (This may connect to water and faith.)</p> <p><i>Refer to – Background content for facilitator/educator – sections 2-1-2c-d.</i></p> <p><b>3-5 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator then takes the students through some discussion on water and faith (spiritual / cultural value of water).</p> <p><b>10-15 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator will conduct activity - WC-2-1-Activity-IIIa</p> <p>The group has 5 minutes to match the images of water practices with the values relating to water.</p> <p><b>10 mins</b></p>
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	<p>Each student needs to think individually about the questions given in WC-2-1- Activity-IIIb and write down their answers each within 15 words on a Quick Write sheet provided.</p> <p><b>5-10 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator will select students at random from each group to answer questions in WC-2-1-Activity-IIIb.</p> <p><b>10-15 mins</b></p> <p>Facilitator/educator brings students into a discussion where they contribute different actions that they would like to implement towards building respect for, and valuing water. Facilitator/educator may enlist these on the board as 'collective action' or a collective pledge by the class.</p>
Differentiation	<p>The level of scaffolding required for individual students for each activity will vary and depend largely on the diversity of the classroom. Differentiation can mainly consist of the level of challenge the facilitator/educator may want to provide to students, for example how many hints or how much help with answering questions.</p>
Additional activities	<p>Students may be given the book Paani Party as prior reading.</p>
Anticipated challenges and solutions	<p>This is a sensitive topic and one will have to respect the diversity of faith and beliefs in the group - go slow, let children bring in examples of water use from their homes, e.g. there may be a puja room where sacred water (amrit, jal) is kept.</p>
Keywords	<p>Culture, values, sacred, faith, rituals, water values, water practices,</p>

	economic, governance, spiritual, environmental, social
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## 2-1-2 Background content for facilitator/educator

### 2-1-2a Why culture matters

*All relations between people and their environment are embedded in culture (UNESCO, 2003).*

*Due to the elementary role of water in people's life, the various ways to treat, handle and use water have forever been anchored in people's cultural values and traditional practices.*

(further reading) [Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#)

### 2-1-2b What is culture

Culture defines a system of shared values, beliefs, behaviour and symbols that members of different societal groups use to interact with their social surroundings. The way in which cultures manifest themselves is made visible through three different categories:

- Artifacts and symbols (tangible, e.g. deities, a cross or shrine, a water pot)
- Traditions, rituals and practices, language (intangible)
- Values and beliefs (social norms)

In this session, we are looking a little more deeply at our **values concerning water** or the different ways in which we value water. We value water for many reasons. Why does the way we value water matter? Because our values motivate our behaviour, and if we are to change our behaviour towards water (e.g. respect, not waste water) then we need to change our values first.

Following values are associated with water:

- Economic value – water pricing, commodification of water (buying water in a plastic bottle, paying for a metered water connection or the volume of water used for irrigation)
- Environmental value (e-flows, water for nature)
- Social value (rooted in notions of justice and equity – fairness in allocation)
- Spiritual value / cultural identity (indigenous communities / cosmology)
- Governance value (transparency / participation / accountability)

So when we talk about values in relation to water we need to understand that there are different value systems and some are more dominant than others. For example, for centuries humankind has tried to tame rivers and control water flows by building big dams, providing or selling power to downstream consumers often at the cost of upstream communities. According to the state, all water users in urban areas are entitled to 135 **litres per capita per day** (lpcd) and in rural areas this is 55 lpcd including water for livestock. Yet water usage in many cities in India exceeds 200 lpcd – though access to water is unequal and many poor people spend hours at handpumps or standposts waiting their turn to collect barely 5-10 litres of water for their households. Similarly in rural areas, women, particularly from marginalised communities, walk miles to collect water daily – so the social value of water cannot be quantified in the same way as water's economic value (pricing).

Looking at water from this perspective brings up several questions - How do we prioritise different values concerning water? Who decides what should be 'valued'? Where can we see (water) conflicts between different values concerning water? Where are the synergies of different values concerning water?

## 2-1-2c Water and Social Organisation

Water is central to life – as the primal fluid, water is also integral to all our faiths. Great civilisations have flourished on the banks of our holy rivers, from the Ganga to the Godavari, from the Sabarmati in Ahmedabad to the Mula-Mutha in Pune, these rivers have been a witness to human development over the centuries. And yet, it is these very human beings (us), who while we worship our rivers as female divinities and seek their blessings in our daily rituals also desecrate them with the waste from our offerings, with raw sewage flowing from our unconnected homes, with untreated industry waste, by creating walls and embankments on the river banks, destroying the riparian ecosystem, and blocking or destroying the springs that feed the rivers. But it was not always so.

A glass of water continues to be the first thing that any guest is offered when they knock on your door. Along the roadside in several places in the country, free water is provided to travelers and passers-by. These are often found near business organisations, communities, political outfits, religious places etc. The motivation behind the practice is said to be ‘*Seva bhavo*’ that is service to the society. Examples of such **hydrophilanthropy** are given below:

1. *parabs* (earthen pots) can be found in Gujarat



Image of a Parab (Photo credit: Dr Sara Ahmed)

<https://www.livingwatersmuseum.org/free-drinking-water>

The image below shows the different kinds of such hydrophilanthropic efforts around Gujarat





## 2. pyaavs in Mumbai

Philanthropists built public fountains in many of our cities (pyaavs in Mumbai and Pune), often in the memory of their ancestors. While many still stand today, **most of them** no longer provide water, as their aquifers have dried up, and many people have access to piped water systems which they consider safer.

<https://confluence.livingwatersmuseum.org/water-build-heritage/what-is-pyaav.php>



### 3. paanpois in Pune

<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/pyaavs-and-paanpois/>



Paanpoi near Sholapur Bazaar police station donated by Shri Vivek Yadav

### Transformation of public fountains and similar heritage

While several fountains are being revived by conservation architects, such as Flora Fountain in Mumbai, they remain largely ornamental or symbolic and do not necessarily provide free water to the public. <https://confluence.livingwatersmuseum.org/water-build-heritage/pyaav-tales.php>



Flora fountain **has been** revived but does not provide free drinking water.



Rao Bahadur Keshavji Nathoo Sailor Pyaav,  
Yellow Gate Police Station

A *pyaav* that used to dispense water now houses the divine: the structure has been retrofitted into a shrine but was originally a fountain.



Left: a defunct old drinking water fountain in Pune. Right: A modern functional drinking water dispensing unit (*paanpoi*) in Pune.

## 2-1-2d Water and Faith

The cultural association of various communities with water is often reflected in their rituals and sacred texts. They present a uniting factor across faiths.



Left: In a gurudwara. Image by Minaz Ansari  
Below: Wuzu. Image by Mohammed Esa Shaikh



Water is used for washing of feet before prayers in a mosque (*wuzu*) or before entering a gurudwara.

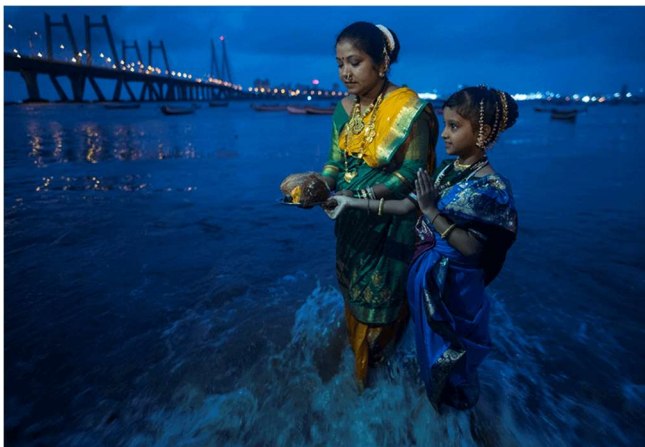


Water marks the beginning of life through the baptism ceremony in the Christian faith and the Sikh initiation ceremony. It also marks the end of life during the Asthi Visarjan ceremony to release a soul after death in the Hindu religion.



Left: Baptism (Image by Jovel Silva) Right: *Asthi Visarjan* (Pratik Chorge).

The relationship of fishing communities like *koli*, *bhoi* and *katkari* with their rivers intertwines their cultures, rituals, mythology and livelihoods with their waters.



Left: Women of the *koli* community in Mumbai making ritual offerings to the rivers during Narali Purnima (Image by Pratik Chogre). Right: Women of the *koli* community in Pune making ritual offerings to the rivers during *Oti bharane* (Image by Minal Sagare).

Hydrophilathropy (water and charity) finds mythological and ritualistic connections in the Zoroastrian faith as well as during Muharram rituals in the Muslim faith. Zoroastrians regard water as the second creation, and always ensure that their sacred *kuas* (wells) are perpetually exposed to the sky.



Left: A sacred parsi *kua* (well) which is perpetually exposed to the sky (by Ervad Bergis Driver).

Right: Water, sherbet and food is provided to one and all while Muharram is observed as a period of mourning mainly by the Shia Muslim community.

## References

- 1: [Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#)
2. "Aab Aur Aastha", Confluence 2021, Mumbai Water Narratives; Jinisha Lodaya, Minaz Ansari, Mehvish Sayed, Joel Silva, Mohammed Esa Shaikh, Pratik Chorge.  
<https://confluence.livingwatersmuseum.org/water-culture/exhibit01.php>
3. "Tracing the Lost Waters", Punyache Paani; Vijaya Srinivasan, Minal Sagare & Niranjan Garde.  
<https://punyachepaani.livingwatersmuseum.org/story/tracing-the-lost-waters/>
4. "From the seas to the wells and beyond", Gallery-Traditions, Rituals, Practices, Living Waters Museum. Ervad Bergis Driver. <https://www.livingwatersmuseum.org/from-the-seas-to-the-wells-and-beyond>
5. [[File:Flora Fountain Pano.jpg|Flora\_Fountain\_Pano]] : Wikimedia commons

## Water Classrooms WC-2-1-ACTIVITY-I

### A Glass of Water

Student Name:

Class:

Date:

The facilitator/educator will show a glass of water to students and ask them to write the answer to

– What do you think of when you see a glass of water?

- What does a glass of water mean to you?

**Water Classrooms WC-2-1-ACTIVITY-II****Find Them: Our Water Practices**

Student Name:

Class:

Date:

Think of and write about at least 3 members from your family including you and your friends for whom the given statements are true. If possible, briefly identify why or how.

1. We use water for our daily prayers.
2. I am responsible for filling up the water pot in my house.
3. I give water to guests when they come home.
4. I believe that water is a symbol of purity.
5. I have visited a heritage site which shows how water was conserved.
6. I have seen a fight whose main cause was water.
7. I have heard of *night soil*.
8. I have heard of the *Cutting Pani Campaign*.
9. We have 'Holy' or 'Sacred' Water in our house.
10. I know a song...or a story about water



## Water Classrooms WC-2-1-ACTIVITY-IIIa

### Values and Practices

Student Name:

Class:

Date:

Divide students into groups of 4-5.

Each group should be given:

- one set of images of water practices and,
- one set of the five water values.

The facilitator will briefly explain that each table group has been given two types of cards.

Five cards have images and supporting text that represent water practices.

Another five cards have words that represent these ways that people value water.

All the cards are jumbled up.

The task is for the group to work together to **MATCH** the image cards (water practices) with the word cards (value cards). The groups will have 5 minutes to match the images with the values.

At least five **Image cards** for Water Practices can be selected from the file – Water-Practices-Images.pdf

Five **Value Cards** are given below:

# ECONOMIC VALUES

## WATER PRICING

### COMMERCIALIZATION OF WATER

- Buying water in a plastic bottle
  - Paying for a metered water connection
  - The volume of water used for irrigation
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# ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

## WATER FOR NATURE AND ECOLOGY

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# **SOCIAL VALUES**

**ACCESS TO WATER FOR ALL**

**WATER AND WORK**

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# **GOVERNANCE VALUES**

**PARTICIPATION**

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# **SPIRITUAL VALUES**

**INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

**CULTURE / FAITH**

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**Water Classrooms WC-2-1-ACTIVITY-IIIB**

Student Name:

Class:

Date:

Each student needs to think individually about the questions given below and write down their answers each within 15 words (on a Quick Write sheet provided).

1. Rank these 5 different reasons for valuing water (or 5 water values) from most important to least important according to what you have read and heard about. Use the word 'prioritise' in your answer. (prioritise = to arrange (items to be attended to) in order of their relative importance) from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/prioritize>

2. In your opinion, which values concerning water tend to come into conflict with each other? Use the word *conflict* in your answer.

3. In your opinion, which values concerning water tend to support other values? Use the word *synergize or synergy* in your answer. (synergize = The interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects).