Future Compact Mini Unit

This unit will culminate with students acting as a basin commission to draft the successor policy to the 1922 Colorado River Compact while also bringing in life perspective.

(Narrative, Identity, Place - Maybe from “Downriver” (Heather Hansman) and “Run, River, Run” (Ann Zwinger))

Ann Zwinger

It is late as we pull off river and the brilliant pink sunset flushes deep and lurid, color washing the underside of the clouds, glazing the river surface like a sheet of Tiffany glass, turning the sand an incredible mauve. A thin, high whimpering floats across the river from a den of baby coyotes as I pitch the tent. Around it cobbles tile the beach. As far as I am concerned, no stones are more elegant than those worked by a river.

“I sit watching until dusk, hypnotized. I think of the sea as continually sloshing back and forth, repetitive, but my psyche goes with the river- always loping downhill, purposeful, listening only to gravity.”

Heather Hansman

“I don't know if you can truly love a place until it's beaten you around a little and shown you all its sides.”

“I had to be gone, to be in it, to see the good and the bad,” “...For me, it took that constant contact to start to understand the complexity.”

Compact-Thinking Prompts

- What are some tributaries of the Colorado River?
- How many miles does the Green River flow before it reaches the Colorado?
- Identify and list seven U.S. states and two countries that rely on the Colorado River.
- What are the primary sources of the Colorado River’s flow?

Narrative-Thinking Journaling Prompts

- What is your earliest memory of water in this landscape? Describe/draw/watercolor the details of that memory.
- If you had to trace the water that came out of your faucet this morning back to its source, where do you think it started? (Draw a picture) How much of that journey do you actually "see" in your daily life?
- How does water play a role in how you define yourself or your family?
- When you hear about the Colorado River "drying up," what is the primary emotion you feel?

I: The Current Reality
Gain baseline understanding of the Colorado river's hydrology, legal framework, and current crisis.

Activitiy:

1. Guided StoryMap Analysis: Discussion around the historical and technical foundations establishes why the current Colorado Compact is obsolete.

"The Hardest-Working River in the West" (ArcGIS StoryMap)

StoryMap Introduction Questions

The Hardest-Working RIver Jigsaw

Narrative-Thinking Journaling Prompts After Storymap Analysis

Students will choose two of the following prompts to respond to:

1. The Ghost of 1922

The StoryMap reveals that the 1922 Compact was based on an unusually wet period, allocating more water than actually exists.

> Imagine you could send a 30-second telegram back to the 1922 commissioners at Lees Ferry. Knowing what you know now about aridification and the 14.8 MAF reality, what would you tell them? How does it feel to live in the "future" that was shaped by their math mistake?

2. The "Hardest-Working" Label

The StoryMap calls the Colorado the "Hardest-Working River in the West" because every drop is used multiple times.

> Does the phrase "Hardest-Working" sound like a compliment or a warning to you? Based on the maps you just analyzed, do you see the river as a machine that needs to be tuned, or a living thing that is being exhausted? How does your answer change the way you think about the water in your classroom trout tank?

3. The Paper Water vs. Wet Water

You've learned the difference between "Paper Water" (legal rights) and "Wet Water" (actual flow).

> In your own life, what is something you were promised but didn't receive (a "paper promise")? How did that change your relationship with the person who made the promise? Apply that feeling to the Basin: How do you think a farmer or a Tribal leader feels holding "Paper Water" rights for a river that is physically disappearing?

4. Mapping Your Moral Compass

Looking at the Tribal Water Rights map in the StoryMap, you saw that many tribes have "recognized" rights but "unresolved" access.

> Narrative is often about justice. If you were drafting the new Compact today, would you prioritize the Senior Rights (those who were there first, like the Tribes and Ranches) or Current Needs (the millions of people in cities like Phoenix)? Where do you find yourself standing in this "Balancing Act"?

Six-Word Memoir of the River

Students will summarize the state of the basin in exactly six words, inspired by the StoryMap data.

II: Water's Journey: Students gain perspective from stakeholders while also developing their own meaning of water

**Field Experiences: Water & Wastewater Treatment Plants, Seedskadee Fishing day, Agriculture day Forbes Family Farm, Fontenelle Dam, Boulder/Daniel Fish Hatchery*

Forbes Family Farm (Agriculture) **Fieldwork Reflection Sheet**

Students reflect on the "man-made" movement of water (canals/ditches). They integrate the farmer/rancher's story of sweat and soil into their understanding of "priority" and "senior rights."

Focus on the economic and social necessity of agriculture. Farm would discuss water rights seniority, the high cost of implementing efficiency measures, and the impact of mandatory cuts on local food production and rural economies.

Hatcheries (Boulder/Daniel) **Fieldwork Reflection Sheet**

Seedskadee NWR - **Fieldwork Reflection Sheet** *Fishing students need fishing license

Water for nature (environmental flow)

Students tie ecological health to dam operations. Provides data-driven justification for specific volume of water required for environmental needs.

Focus on environmental flow and ecological health. They would explain the concept of "water for nature," how lack of flow impacts specific species and the economic value of recreation that relies on a healthy river.

Water Treatment Plant (½ day) 1st **Fieldwork Reflection Sheet**

Students analyze the treatment process and local water conservation messaging.

Municipal use, quality, demand. Focus on conservation, reliability, and treated return flows. They would explain how their utility plans for growth with less water (demand management), the role of recycling/re-use (connecting to the wastewater plant visit), and the concept of "banking" water.

How is water made potable?

Wastewater Treatment Plant (½ day) 2nd

Students learn about effluent and water recycling potential. Return flow and reuse

Fontenelle Dam (Upstream from GR) **Fieldwork Reflection Sheet**

Supply, Allocation Storage

Tribal Perspectives (Zoom Meeting?)

Focus on unquantified or unused rights, water equity, and cultural significance. They would discuss the history of the *Winters Doctrine* (mentioned in the StoryMap), the lack of infrastructure funding, and the cultural/spiritual definition of water.

III: Narrative and Perspective

Interviews and Stakeholders

Students gather diverse perspectives and synthesize them with the technical data.

Stakeholder Profiles:
*Municipal, *Tribal, *Agricultural, *Recreational/Environmental
Students are asked to understand their stakeholder's historical water allocation.
*Represented in the StoryMap

Interview stakeholders during the field experiences (have students generate and be ready with their questions)
Interviews: Students conduct interviews (see interview questions) with and categorize responses by the core "Meaning of Water" *Can their personal meaning of water come to play here?

Interview Questions - Use these 3, then have students work to generate 3 more questions (either individually or as groups depending on who their stakeholders are)

IV: Future Compact Presentation **Student Rubric and Outline for Compact Defense**

Students synthesize all data and perspectives to create a realistic, scientifically grounded, and equitable policy proposal.

Students work in mixed commission groups to draft the 2026 Colorado River Compact Successor

V: Present to Community

Present to Sweetwater County Water Commission Board

Presentation to include:

1. A visual summary of their new water allocation chart.
2. A defense of how their compact is more equitable and more hydrologically sound than the 1922 Compact.

3. A reflection on how the field trips and interviews influenced their final policy decisions, especially regarding the value of return flow and the necessity of structural efficiency.

V: Personal Narrative

My Place in the Basin

Your essay should answer the central question: "How does my personal story of place influence the future I want to build for the Colorado River?"

"Reading by the River" day where students read a single paragraph of their choice aloud.