

Keep Texas Wild

RIVERS ROCK!

Nature's superhighways go with the flow.

» ROCKING AND ROLLING

ONCE, TEXAS HAD NO HIGHWAYS. In fact, most places didn't even have roads! Many early settlements were built near rivers so people could hop on and go from one part of Texas to another. Today we drive cars, but nature still uses rivers for its highways. Rivers transport nutrients from the land to the sea. As a river flows, it takes mud, plants and rocks with it. These materials come from a process called erosion (such as when pieces of the riverbank break off) and make sediment.

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» **HEADWATERS**

WE CALL a river's world a "river basin" and the place where it begins its "headwaters."

» **TRIBUTARIES**

WHEN IT RAINS, some raindrops soak into the ground while others roll away. The water that rolls away creates creeks and streams, called tributaries. Rainwater zooms to rivers on tributaries.

» **American eel**

IF YOU SEE something that looks like a really fat snake hiding under a rock, you've probably spotted an American eel. Try to pick it up and you might get goeey! These guys produce slippery slime as a defense mechanism.

» **Alligator gar**

MONSTERS OF THE RIVER? Nope, just monstrous fish! Alligator gar sometimes grow 10 feet long and weigh 300 pounds. But never fear — even though their alligator-shaped heads and sharp teeth make them look scary, these dudes are cool.

» **Swimming on bank**

FROM THE BANK, a river may look as if it's barely moving, but beware! Swim carefully because currents are often swifter than they seem.



» FLOODPLAINS

RIVERS ARE BIG, but that doesn't mean they always have room for all the water that tributaries bring them. When they get too full, water spills into floodplains, bringing lots of nutrient-rich sediment with it. Sediment feeds the soil, making floodplains great places to grow crops.

» Crawfish

CRAWFISH MAKE their burrows to stay wet inside. They even create a special door to plug the opening. When threatened, crawfish use their fan-like tails to fling mud into the face of the enemy. Take that, you dirty predator!

» ESTUARY

WHERE A RIVER meets the sea, something very special happens: an estuary is born. Here, fresh and salty water come together, and the river deposits the rest of its sediment. Wading birds flock to Texas' estuaries for plentiful prey. In fact, so many interesting birds hang out here that people come to Texas from all over the world just to see them!

» Gulf salt marsh snake

THE NONVENOMOUS gulf salt marsh snake likes to be out at night just like the critters it eats (such as frogs). If you see one of these shy reptiles, consider yourself lucky.

» Big-claw river shrimp

WHILE WE call them "shrimp," at an average length of 14 inches, these prawns sure won't fit on your dinner plate! When threatened, they've been known to put up their dukes ... um, pincers, that is.

» Orange-throat darter

DON'T LET the name "orange-throat darter" fool you! Bright blue and green also decorate the males. They're called "darters" because these tiny fish quickly dart from danger.

» Roseate spoonbill

THE MORE SHRIMP that roseate spoonbills scoop up and swallow, the pinker they get!



Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD MATH

1) Texas has 15 major rivers. Of those 15, these three form parts of our border:

RED RIVER – forms much of the border between Texas and Oklahoma.

SABINE RIVER – forms much of the border between Texas and Louisiana.

RIO GRANDE – not only forms part of Texas' border, but also part of the border between the United States and Mexico!

What is the probability that a major Texas river would make up part of the Texas border? Use a fraction, then simplify your answer.

2) The **RIO GRANDE** is 1,896 miles long, but 646 miles of it are in New Mexico and Colorado. How many miles does the Rio Grande flow in Texas?

3) These are three well-known Texas rivers and their lengths:

COLORADO RIVER - 600 miles

NECHES RIVER - 416 miles

NUECES RIVER - 315 miles

How many miles do these rivers flow altogether?



>> WILD SOCIAL STUDIES

This river forms part of the border between Texas and Louisiana. In Spanish, its name means "cypress" because lots of cypress trees line its banks. What river is this?

This river flows through Austin, the capital of Texas. Its name means "reddish" in Spanish. What river is this?

In 1841, John Neely Bryan founded the city of Dallas on the banks of this river. It was dammed to create Lake Livingston. LaSalle, who explored it in 1687, called it "River of Canoes." What river is this?

>> KEEPING IT WILD

LOOK DOWN. See those feet of yours? They're standing in your watershed! In a watershed all the water that falls eventually ends up in a common place. To see what a watershed might look like, tightly crumple up a piece of paper and then open it. If the paper was a watershed, water would end up in the areas with creases. It would eventually flow to the part you crumpled first (or the lowest point). The next time it rains hard, watch where the water in your watershed goes!



NEXT MONTH:
Life in a Desert

TEACHER RESOURCE

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