One River, Many Voices

**Overview**

In this activity, students will learn about the Red River and all of the people living within the Red River Basin: MN, ND and Canadian residents. They will also learn about some of the water challenges in the watershed and to discover the importance of working together to resolve problems.

**Objective**

Students will (1) learn how to communicate and work together to protect a common watershed (2) learn how to be a good water neighbor, no matter what side of the border you live on.

**Vocabulary Words**

Watershed – the land surface that water flows across or under on its way to a stream, river or lake

Steward – a person who uses our natural resources through conservation and sustainable practices

Cooperate – work together to achieve a common goal

**Materials**

Book: *River Friendly, River Wild* (if unavailable, read the poem below)

The river cutout

Old coffee can (something of similar size with no holes) with rubber band fit very snug around it; 8 strings should be tied to the rubber band

Pile of twigs

Pollution: string with plastic bottles/paper strips

A flood line – string with flood pictures

A drought line – string with drought pictures

Red River Role ID tags for students with representing flags: MN, ND, Canada

**Activity**

1. Read the poem *The Red River:*

The river wiggled like a fat brown thread along the flat quilt of the Red River Valley,

Stitching North Dakota and Minnesota together.

My friend Sarah and I ran races up and down the dike.

In winter, we walked across the river to touch Minnesota.

In spring, we sat on her back porch and watched the river ripple.

Sometimes, full of spring rain, it crawled up her yard,

Leaving chunks of trees that we made into pirate ships.

My brother, Max, fished on the river’s banks.

Sometimes he let me carry his fishing pole and I sat beside him,

Loving the wet, muddy smell of the summer river.

One time, Max caught the biggest fish any of us ever saw!

I ran and got the scale.

We weighed it and Max kissed it

And then he threw it back.

That was us.

That was the river.

1. Remind students that the Red River is a pretty unique river by the fact that it flows north. Only a few dozen rivers in the world run north, including the longest river in the world, The Nile River in Africa. Other fun facts about the Red River:
   * The Red River is in the top 25% in water quality in the country (don’t let the color fool you – it is that color because of our red clay soils)
   * During the winter months of the 1890s, horse-drawn sleighs would race on the frozen Red River
   * The Red River was the center of entertainment! There was a public swimming area with dock and rope swing, hotels and saloons, and a floating stage for plays, ballets and outdoor concerts
   * In the 1920s, Moorhead built a tourist camp near the river – tent sites, recreation center, laundry facilities and cabins for those less adventurous folk
2. Ask the students “who uses the Red River?” After a short time, remind students that everyone is a neighbor in the basin: birdwatcher, farmer, manufacturer, cattle rancher, wildlife biologist, city manager, boater……
   * What does it mean to be a good neighbor?
   * Being a good neighbor means you:
     + communicate with others
     + follow the rules
     + cooperate
     + show respect
     + Watch out for other people.
   * Just like your neighborhood, watersheds rely on people being good neighbors. A good neighbor in a watershed is also called being a good steward. We all live downstream – everything we do can affect our watershed and even those neighbors who live downstream from us (Grand Forks/East Grand Forks, Winnipeg, farmers, parks, etc.)
3. Assign each student an ID tag and that will be their Red River role
   * Based on the flag on the ID tag, have the students figure out which side of the river to stand
   * Even if the student is representing a homeowner in town and not the riverfront, the house is still connected:
     + Your rooftop 🡪 gutter 🡪 downspout 🡪 yard 🡪 driveway 🡪 street 🡪 storm drain 🡪 **RIVER**
4. To flow down the river:
   * Choose 8 students to hold the strings attached to the can (or less if it’s a small class - there needs to be 6 students on the drought, flood, and pollution lines). Have them imagine it’s filled with water. They will work together to meander down the river through the obstacles – without tipping the bucket (or the ‘water’)!!!
   * Two students will each hold an end of the flood string that stretches across the river. Hold this string about 2 feet off the floor simulating a flood. The group meandering downstream with the can of water needs to go *over* the string, just like a flooded river.
   * Two students holding the string of pollution. The group meandering downstream will go *through* this ‘pollution.’
   * Two students will each hold an end of the drought string that stretches across the river. Hold this string about 3 feet off the floor simulating a drought. The group meandering downstream with the can of water needs to go *under* the string, just like a river during a drought.
   * The rest of the students will stand on the side of the river/border represented by the flag on each ID tag.
5. Point out to the students when they cross the Canada border.
6. When they reach the end of the river – Lake Winnipeg – Do as many rounds as time allows, but it would be great if every student could be part of the meandering river.

**Wrap-up**

1. How can we be good watershed neighbors even if we don’t live on the river?
   * Communicate with neighbors and local officials
   * Work together (cooperate) to protect your watershed
   * Encourage parents to plant CRP (Conservation, Protection, Restoration)
   * Conserve water
   * Prevent/clean up pollution within watershed
   * Protect/restore wetlands
   * Plant trees
   * Spread the word on how to be a Good Watershed Neighbor
   * Many more….
2. Remember – YOU are a watershed neighbor, and everything you do to protect watershed makes a difference. Small steps lead to big changes!