

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **PRAYING FOR RAIN**

Adapted from an article by Christine Graf

The **Salatul Istisqa** is the Muslim drought prayer. Arabs are praying for rain to bring an end to the severe water crisis that they are experiencing. Recently, 13 Arab countries were listed in the world's top 20 water-scarce countries. Experts are concerned that "water wars" could erupt as these countries become more desperate for water.

The Arab water crisis is expected to worsen as the population in the Middle East continues to grow. Demand for water may exceed supply by 40% in the next 20 years. Climate change is causing higher temperatures, less rainfall, and increased water evaporation rates in the region. Crops are affected by these changes and scientists are predicting a 20% decrease in agricultural yields. Less food leads to food shortages, famines, and higher prices. Increasing food prices have already contributed to riots in many Arab nations.

Yemen is among the poorest countries on earth and is facing one of the world's most severe water shortages. The country has suffered major droughts. Almost 60% of its people don't have access to adequate drinking water. Many women and children in rural areas spend hours each day searching for water. When clean water is not available, they fill containers with water from polluted streams. As a result, many people are getting sick from water-borne diseases.

Things aren't much better in Yemen's urban areas. The capital city, Sanaa, is at risk of becoming the world's first capital city to run out of water. Water only flows through the city's taps about once a week. Residents must use public fountains to fill their water containers during the rest of the week.

The people were so desperate for water that armed conflicts erupted throughout the country. The government was blamed for doing little to help solve the water crisis. Water-use bans were ignored, and leaky pipes never fixed. This is one of the reasons that the people revolted in 2015 and overthrew the government. The country is now fighting a brutal civil war. Thousands have died in Yemen from violence, disease, and lack of access to clean water.

Jordan is experiencing a water crisis like the one in Yemen. The country is 92% desert and has been plagued by droughts. It's main river, the Jordan River, has nearly dried up. It lost 95% of its natural flow because canals, dams, and irrigation projects were built by countries located upriver from Jordan. By the time the river ends in Jordan, there is little water left to empty into the Dead Sea. As a result, the Dead Sea could totally disappear by 2050.

Unlike Yemen's government, the wealthy Jordanian government is doing all that it can to address the crisis. The king has spent more than \$1 billion to tap into a 300,000-year-old aquifer, an underground layer of porous rock, to extract the groundwater water. Jordan is also building a \$15 billion pipeline through the desert to transfer water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. In the meantime, the people of Jordan must buy water from distributors who use tankers to fill water tanks located on rooftops and in underground wells.

Similar water shortages are occurring throughout the Middle East. Wealthier nations such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are better able to deal with the crisis. They have built high-tech desalination plants that turn salty seawater into clean drinking water. These plants supply much needed water to the region, but many countries simply cannot afford to build the facilities.

The solution to the water crisis in the Middle East is for Arab nations to learn to manage their limited water supplies better. First and foremost, they must become more efficient in the way that they use water for farming. Agriculture consumes 85% of the Middle East's water supply. Much of this water is wasted due to old, leaky irrigation systems. In addition, governments must work together and agree to rules that ensure that all countries have access to water. For example, countries with shared rivers must agree not to divert water from reaching their downstream neighbors. This will not be easy because many countries within the Middle East have poor relationships with one another. It will be up to them to mend these relationships because without water, none of them will survive.

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## **Elaborate: “Praying for Rain”**

**Task:** Read the article. Use information & cite evidence from the text to answer the questions.

1. What *natural resource* is the article about? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What does it mean if a resource is *scarce*?

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3-6. List the effects that a lack of food caused by droughts can have on a country.

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7-10. How has the water crisis affected the lives of people in Yemen? Provide examples.

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11-13. What three factors are causing the Jordan River to dry up?

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14-15. How is the government’s response to the crisis different in Jordan than Yemen? Why?

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16-17. What are two solutions Jordan is attempting to solve the water crisis?

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18. Why don't all Middle Eastern countries build desalination plants?

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19. What economic activity wastes the most water in the region?

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20-21. What two things do countries in the region need to do to help solve the crisis?

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22. Explain why water has been nicknamed "blue gold" in the Middle East.

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23-25. Explain the term "water war". Provide examples of its causes and effects.

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