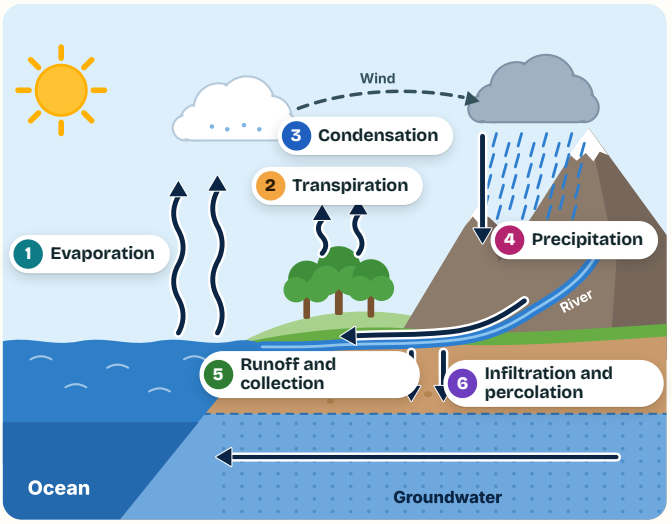
THE WATER CYCLE · PART 1 OF 8 · AGES 11–16

The Water Cycle Explained

Powered by the Sun and pulled by gravity, water moves endlessly between the sea, the sky and the land.



1 Evaporation

The Sun heats oceans, lakes and rivers, turning liquid water into invisible water vapour. Oceans supply most of it.

2 Transpiration

Plants take up water through their roots and release vapour through tiny leaf pores called stomata.

3 Condensation

Rising vapour cools and condenses into tiny droplets around specks of dust or salt, forming clouds.

4 Precipitation

Droplets join and grow until they are too heavy to float, then fall as rain, snow or hail.

5 Runoff and collection

Water flows over the land into streams, rivers and lakes, and finally back to the sea.

6 Infiltration and percolation

Some water soaks into the soil and trickles down to become groundwater that feeds wells and springs.

Flying rivers over the Amazon

Winds carry Atlantic moisture west over the Amazon rainforest. Trees return rain to the air by transpiration, so it can fall again and again. Near the Andes, up to about 60% of the moisture in the air comes from the forest.

NEXT IN THE SERIES

2. Earth's Water by the Numbers

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