

Long ago, there were no freshwater rivers or lakes in China. The saltwater Eastern Sea was the only water on Earth.

Water that is full of salt is not good to drink, and it is not good for watering crops. So the people could not use the salt water from the Eastern Sea. They could only use rainwater for drinking and for watering their crops.

So the people of China needed rain. Whenever the sky was clear and without rain clouds, the people worried. They prayed to the rain gods to send rain.

Usually the rain gods sent rain when the people needed it. But one hot summer, there was no rain for weeks. The people looked for black rain clouds but saw only clear skies.

Without rain, the crops started to turn brown and die. "If our crops die, there will be no food to eat," said the people. "And without rain, we won't have water to drink! We'll die!"

The people continued to call to the rain gods for rain, but no rain came.

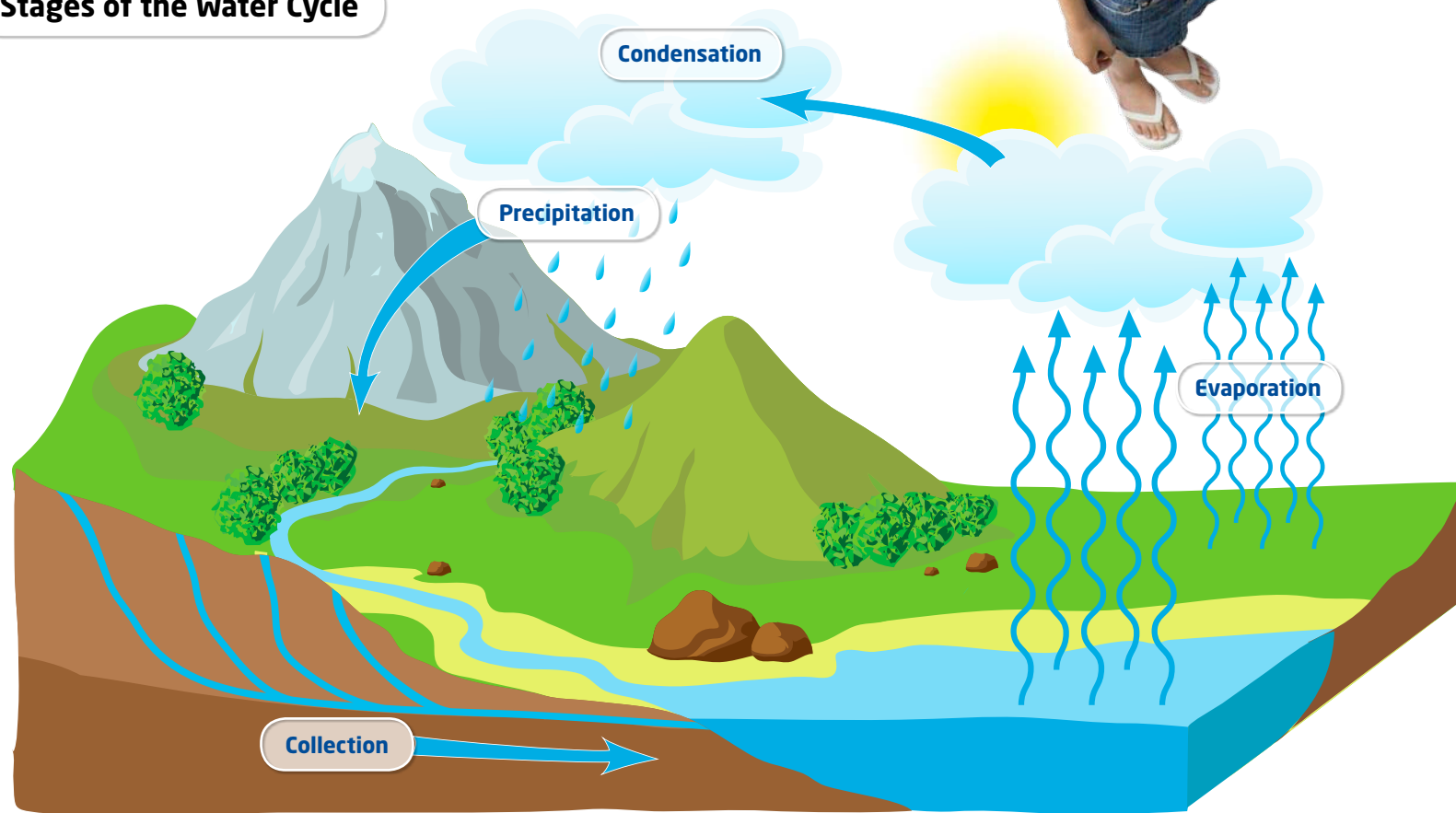
Facts About the Water Cycle

The water you drank today may have fallen from the sky recently, but it is not new. That water has likely existed for as long as the earth has. It may be the same water a dinosaur drank millions of years ago. Or it may be the water that the explorer Marco Polo sailed on in the 1200s.

The earth has a limited amount of water. The same water keeps moving around again and again in an endless cycle called the "water cycle." It is the cycle water takes as it travels from the land to the sky and back again to the land. These are the stages of the water cycle.



Stages of the Water Cycle



Evaporation:

Evaporation happens when the sun heats the water in rivers, lakes, and oceans and changes the liquid water into vapor. This vapor rises up to the sky.

Condensation:

Condensation happens when the vapor that rose up to the sky cools and returns to a liquid state. The droplets of water form clouds.

Precipitation:

When enough droplets combine and they are heavy enough to fall, they return to earth as rain, or if they freeze, snow.

Collection:

This water that falls back down to earth gets collected by bodies of water like oceans, lakes, and rivers. When it falls on the ground, it soaks into the earth and becomes water that plants and animals drink. Then the cycle begins again!