

5th Grade - Lesson 1.4

The water cycle

Student Reading

The water cycle

There are a few very special processes that make life on Earth possible, and the water cycle is one of them. A continuous supply of water is necessary for all plants, animals, and people to survive.

Here's how it works:



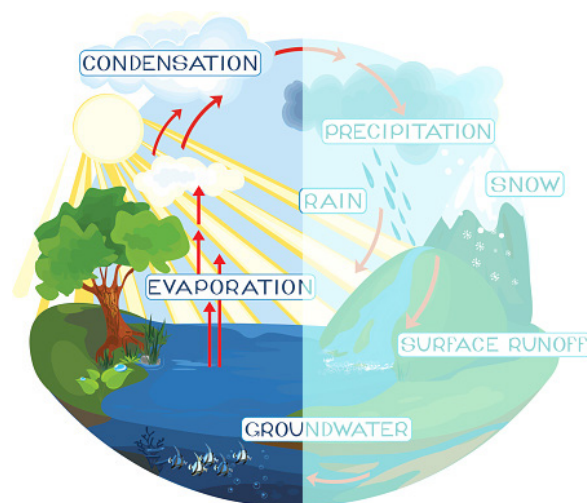
Going up

Evaporation, condensation, and cloud formation

Water in oceans, lakes, and rivers evaporates and changes from liquid water to water vapor, which is a gas.

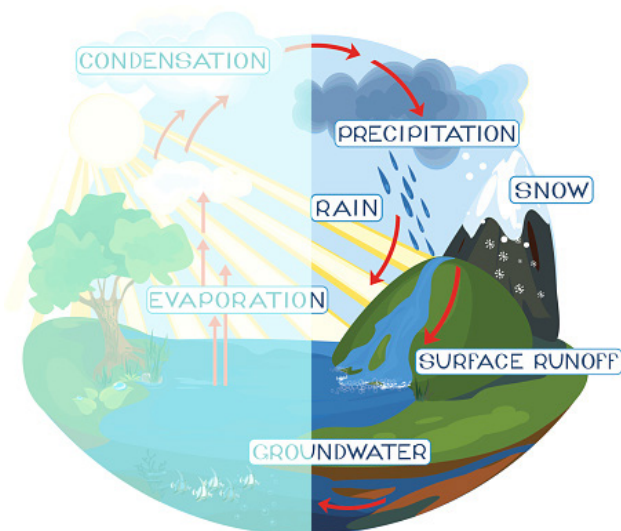
The water molecules mix into the air and some molecules are carried high into the atmosphere where it is colder. If there are enough water molecules and the temperature is cold enough, the water molecules condense to form tiny droplets of liquid water. If it is even colder, they can turn into tiny ice crystals.

These droplets and crystals are so small and light that they stay suspended in the air. When enough water droplets or ice crystals form in the same area, they create a cloud that we can see from the ground.



Coming down

Rain and snow fall from the clouds



As water molecules continue to condense, the water droplets and ice crystals get bigger and bigger.

Eventually they get large and heavy enough that they can no longer stay suspended in the air. The droplets then fall to the ground as rain or the ice crystals fall as snowflakes.

The water has then completed the cycle: It started on Earth, went into the air, and came back down to Earth where plants, animals, and people can use it.