



acadience® reading k–6

Student Materials

Grade 6 | Benchmark 3

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with

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Sea of Salt

► Imagine a body of water in which animals and plants cannot live. Imagine a body of water that is so buoyant that a person cannot sink in it. Now imagine people being able to sit upright and read a newspaper while floating on that same body of water. There is such an unusual place, and it is called the Dead Sea.

This inland sea lies at the lowest point on earth, in a desert valley far below sea level. The nations of Israel and Jordan are next to the Dead Sea. The Jordan River flows into it, but there is no outlet, so evaporation is the only way that water escapes. When the water evaporates, it leaves behind heavy salts and minerals that prevent plants and animals from living in the sea. The Dead Sea is a very salty sea, nearly nine times saltier than the ocean.

Although the sea supports no life, people flock to its shores. The salty water stings people's skin and eyes. Still, many people believe that the minerals in the water and surrounding mud have an amazing ability to help cure sicknesses and ailments. The humidity is low, and the air is free from pollen, so people with breathing problems find relief near the Dead Sea.

The sea that is already dead is shrinking as irrigation waters are pulled from the Jordan River, reducing its flow into the Dead Sea. The sea is becoming smaller and even more saline. This ancient sea is an important part of the region's long history, and people are concerned that it may disappear altogether. However, there are no easy solutions for saving the Dead Sea. Some scientists want people to allow more water from the Jordan River to flow into the sea. Others have suggested connecting the Dead Sea with the Red Sea. Time will tell whether or not the Dead Sea disappears completely, leaving nothing but a barren valley.

Another World

▶ Out in the water, tubes of seaweed swayed in the gentle swells. The sun reflected flashes of bright light on the water's surface, while on the beach a dozen friends were busy preparing their gear. Victoria's cousin Hector was among them. As Victoria walked up to the group, she could feel their excitement.

Some of the divers were putting on their facemasks, snorkels, and flippers. Others added belts loaded with heavy weights. Hector explained that the extra weight helped their buoyant bodies stay underwater. Hector and his friends were preparing to go free diving. In free diving, swimmers hold their breath as long as possible and dive as deep as possible. Hector explained that when you are free diving you do not carry air tanks or oxygen as you do when scuba diving. He emphasized that it was very important to be properly trained before attempting any kind of diving.

Victoria said, "I want to learn to free dive. Will you please teach me?"

Hector agreed to give her a preliminary lesson, and he borrowed his sister's diving equipment. His sister was about Victoria's size, so her facemask and fins would fit snugly but comfortably. "Today we will stay in shallow water," said Hector. "I'll accompany you throughout, so you don't have to be anxious about diving too deep and running out of breath."

Hector showed her how to fit the face mask over her eyes and nose and how to clear the mask when it flooded. It was up to Victoria to practice holding her breath as long as she could.

They moved into slightly deeper water so Victoria could practice kicking with her flippers to propel herself into the depths and then return to the surface. Even in the shallow water, Victoria glimpsed the magic of the underwater world, full of brightly colored fish and strange sea creatures. She could hardly wait until she could go out farther with Hector and continue exploring the sea.

The Barefoot Runner

► When the Summer Olympic Games were held in Rome, Italy, the marathon was won in a most unusual way. As was usual, the final event for track and field was the marathon race. What was not usual was that Abebe Bikila ran the race barefoot, and won. That day, Bikila became the first person from East Africa to win an Olympic gold medal.

Bikila was born in Ethiopia in 1932. He spent his early years going to school and taking care of his family's sheep. When he got older, he worked for several years as a bodyguard with the government. While watching a parade, he noticed a group of athletes wearing shirts with "Ethiopia" on the back. When he learned they represented his country in the Olympic Games, he decided to become one of them.

When Bikila qualified to be in the Olympics, he had run only two marathons in his life, both in his home country. The world had not yet heard of this remarkable runner. However, he became a well-known hero after easily winning the marathon in world record time. Even more amazing than his win was that he ran the entire race barefoot. He said he found his shoes and socks uncomfortable, so he chose to run without them.

Bikila had to have his appendix removed shortly before the next Olympics in Tokyo, Japan. Although he had not fully recovered from the operation, he raced again, this time in shoes. He again easily won the marathon by the largest margin in history. A great runner from Australia called Bikila's win "the greatest performance ever in track and field."

Bikila had become the first runner to win the Olympic marathon twice in a row. Throughout his career, he ran fifteen marathons and won twelve. Abebe Bikila is now remembered as being one of the best runners in the world.
