Lesson 2

Exploring a river's journey

Enquiry Question:	Expected Duration:	Key Stage:
What is a river's journey down its course?	1 Hour	2

Learning Objectives:

1. **Know:** the features of a river's journey
2. **Understand:** your own local river's journey
3. **Apply:** create the journey of a river

Extension: How are rivers linked to their human and physical environment?

Learning Outcomes:

All pupils will be able to: label the start and end points of a river

Most pupils will be able to: describe what happens to the river on its journey

More able pupils will be able to: explain the river journey

Time:

5 Mins

Starter task: River source or mouth? (slide 2)

Which image shows the start of the river, and which shows the end? Students could look at the river shape, the amount of water and the direction of river flow.

Suggested Assessment for Learning (AFL): Students to vote image A or B. Add the animation to reveal the answers.

Suggestion differentiation:

More support: Discuss the features in each image as a group before students vote. You could print off the images and ask students to label what they notice about the river.

Challenge: What other features might you see at the river source and mouth? E.g. River widens towards the mouth, flatter landscape. At the source, the land is often steeper, in the mountains, rivers are narrow.

How did the river start in this image? The idea of rainfall infiltrating or soaking into the soil and forming a spring.

Time: **10 Mins**	**Task 2: River journey (slide 4)** After exploring the source of the river, Scout then kayaks down the course of the river, what might she see on her journey? Think about the physical/ natural and human features. E.g. the source image shows the upper course of the river, the v shaped valley, rainwater sinking through into the soil (infiltration) and starting the river. **Suggested AFL:** Think, pair, share. Students write down or draw their ideas on whiteboards if preferred. **Suggested Differentiation:** **More support:** Use images of different sections of the rivers or add more key words. Print out the images for students to label. Discuss the images first as a class, before students draw/ write/ label their answers. **Challenge:** Remove the key words if not needed. Why might Scout see these features on her journey? Are they all natural (physical features)?
Time: **10 mins**	**Task 3: River features (slide 5)** Match the river feature with its name and where you might find it in the river journey/ course. **Suggested AFL:** Students can write answers for each label on whiteboards, or vote using their fingers/ number cards. **Suggested differentiation:** **More support:** Show a diagram of the river sections and talk through the different features that you might find in each section. **Challenge:** Remove hint words. Select one of the features, how do you think it has been formed?
Time: **15 Mins**	**Task 4: Investigate your local river (slide 7)** Complete the fact file for their local river: river name, source, mouth, places the river passes. **Classroom based:** Exploration using atlases or computers on your preferred platform (e.g. Google Earth or Esri's UK River Atlas, see References below) to view your local river journey from source to mouth.

You could print out a map for students to label with the features. Extend this into a map challenge with grid references, and a key, linking to the primary curriculum.

Practical fieldwork: You could visit your local river to explore its characteristics, use field sketches to capture these. Possibly measure the river speed using a stop clock, measuring stick and a floating item to record how long it takes for this item to travel the distance you are recording. Use maths skills to calculate speed = distance/ time and present using graphs.

Suggested AFL: Feedback the answers to the group to complete the class fact file.

Differentiate for different learners:

More support: Create information sheets for students to use to complete their fact file. They could annotate a hard copy of a map of your local river.

Challenge: What other questions might you ask about the river? Add the answers to the fact file. E.g. the direction the river travels, historical places it passes etc. with explanations of why these are located on the river.

Time:

15 Mins

Task 5: Create your local river journey

Create the journey of your local river. Add labels using your fact file if you can. This could be a presentation of your findings from the investigation task above.

Some suggestions for this activity:

Practical activity: Activity cards titled: “How does a river begin and where does it go?”

Playground activity: One student is the river source, stood at higher ground (if appropriate). Students start in a long line, then gradually they move into a wiggle to match the shape of the river. Students represent places along the route and the source and mouth. Throw a ball down the line while students shout these out in order, the ball represents the river flow.

Classroom based:

- Create a storyboard of the journey of the river
- Create an art piece to show highlights of the river
- Write a story to describe the local river journey including who might live there
- Create a 3D model of your local river, add labels

	Suggested AFL: Present any creations to the class with explanations for their choices **Differentiate for different learners:** **More support:** Depending on the activity chosen, could ask students to label and annotate local river images. **Challenge:** What might live in and around the river? Can you add these on? Thinking about the natural environment within and surrounding the river.
Time: **5 Mins**	**Plenary: Match the landmark** Match the river landmark (human features) to the photo **Suggested AFL:** Students vote for the right answer using whiteboards or number cards. Stand up voting. **Differentiate for different learners:** **More support:** Add extra clues e.g. country where the landmark is based. **Challenge:** Why are these landmarks next to rivers? Thinking about settlement next to rivers in particular large cities. What are the names of the rivers that these landmarks are next to?

Teacher Notes:

Resources:

- PowerPoint slides
- Whiteboards, exercise books, voting cards
- Possible worksheets to create using maps/ images of your local river
- Computers and access to Google Earth or Esri River Atlas
- Atlases
- Media to create river journey/ space to create 3D activity
- Fieldwork equipment: stopwatches, floating item, measuring stick, large tape measure, recording worksheet,

Curriculum Links:

Geography:

- UK Counties and cities and their rivers and physical landscape
- Basic vocabulary for human and physical features
- Rivers as a topological feature of the physical landscape
- GIS and mapping, using maps, atlases and digital mapping to locate and describe the features (National curriculum in England, 2013)
- Aerial photographs of rivers
- Human geography focusing on settlement and land use
- Using fieldwork to observe, measure, record and present the human and physical features in your local river" (National curriculum in England, 2013)
- Developing map skills using grid reference, symbols and keys to enhance knowledge of the UK (National curriculum in England, 2013).

Art:

- Creating a river journey using a variety of media.

History:

- Local history and settlement next to rivers.

Maths:

- Calculating speed= distance over time and presenting using graphs.

Key Words:

Source	Sea	Landmark	Valley
Mouth	Direction	Mountain	Factories

References:

Department for Education, 2013, **National curriculum in England: geography programmes of study,** Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-geography-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-geography-programmes-of-study (accessed December 2025).

Esri UK Schools Team, 2021, **Schools Atlas of UK Rivers,** Available at: https://esriukeducation.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/62ea9adc0a4f424cbf9a76ef24a93be8 (accessed December 2025).

Google Earth, 2025, **Explore Google Earth**, Available at: https://earth.google.com/web/@52.51500099,0.41847381,-52.24201075a,807209.33385462d,35y,-0h,0t,0r/data=CgRCAggBOgMKATBCAggASg0I_____ARAA, (accessed December 2025).

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