NEWS BREAK

Article: **Sockeye pass dam with a first-of-its-kind 'helix'**

Section: **NW, C1**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, June 7, 2026,** of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable for your students.

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Learning Objectives:

After reading the article, students will analyze how salmon restoration projects in the Yakima Basin are addressing the environmental challenges created by dams, water management, and climate change. Students will be able to explain the importance of fish passage systems, such as the Cle Elum Lake helix, in restoring salmon populations and reconnecting ecosystems. Students will evaluate how collaboration among Indigenous communities, environmental organizations, farmers, and government agencies can help balance the needs of people, agriculture, and wildlife while planning for a more sustainable future.

Pre-Reading Discussion:

- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A ***context clue*** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

"Looming above full reservoirs and churning rivers are mostly ***barren craggy*** peaks."

Barren Guess:

Barren Definition:

Craggy Definition:

Craggy Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Water cascaded round and round … and round and round the spiral waterslide with a thundering roar. It was hard to tell exactly who was along for this wild ride. But inside the current were young sockeye salmon cruising to the next stop in their life's journey. The first-of-its-kind fish passage contraption, called a "_____," was bored into the shore of Cle Elum Lake.
2. It allows salmon to pass the nearly century-old dam that led to their _____ from this place.

3. Its completion this spring marked a step toward reconnecting the Yakima basin, and bringing back its once-abundant salmon returns in the Columbia. And it's just one piece of a sweeping blueprint for the future of water, people and fish in _____ _____.
4. The current collaboration between Yakama Nation, environmentalists, farmers and federal, state and local governments that birthed the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan has been heralded by advocates as a model for the future of _____ and _____ _____ in the West.
5. Meanwhile, climate change is marching on. Snow — once relied upon to melt and sustain the basin through the hot and dry months — is visibly _____.
6. _____ _____ efforts are already underway. As the state faces an unprecedented fourth consecutive drought, projects across the basin are chugging along.
7. The largest of the projects in this drought-plagued valley is here. The helix has been years in the making, costing $_____ million in state and federal funding.
8. For millennia, Yakama Nation fisheries experts explain, these streams were teeming with salmon. Oral histories tell of salmon running so thick it was as if one could _____ _____their backs.
9. The lakes acted as _____ for sockeye, a salmon that relies upon freshwater lakes in its life cycle.
10. But in one generation, the construction of _____ caused the extinction of sockeye in the Yakima River. All of the salmon and the steelhead and bull trout that belonged up there were blocked off from those headwaters.
11. An estimated 800,000 to 1 million salmon and steelhead historically returned to spawn across the basin; today the 10-year average for adult salmon and steelhead returns is just over _____. Dams impounded the lakes to store more water as this salmon country transitioned to an agricultural valley. There was no way for fish to get around them.
12. A long-term solution needed to more closely mimic their _____ _____.
13. "The salmon was the very first one to Spring Chinook return every year after a long, hard winter, bringing nutrients from their ocean journey, and are honored in a _____ _____ _____ as they begin to arrive. If there are no fish, Goudy said, "if these go extinct, we are no more." "That's why we're here," he continued, "so these guys don't collapse."

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive "Connect & Explain" comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment:

- The article describes how salmon disappeared from the Yakima Basin after dams were built. What responsibilities do people have to repair environmental damage caused by past decisions, even if those decisions benefited society at the time?
- Why do you think restoring salmon populations has become a priority for so many different groups, including tribal nations, farmers, scientists, conservationists, and government agencies?
- The Yakama Nation has worked for decades to bring salmon back to their historic habitat. How can cultural traditions and Indigenous knowledge contribute to modern environmental solutions?
- The new fish passage system cost $255 million to build. How should communities decide whether expensive environmental restoration projects are worth the investment?
- The article suggests that climate change is making water management more difficult. How might future generations be affected if communities do not adapt to changing water supplies?
- Why is access to cool, healthy habitat becoming increasingly important for salmon survival as temperatures continue to rise?
- The Yakima Basin Integrated Plan attempts to balance the needs of agriculture, wildlife, and people. Why can balancing competing interests be difficult, and what strategies can help communities reach compromises?
- The article describes salmon as an important part of the ecosystem. What effects might occur if salmon populations continue to decline throughout the Pacific Northwest?
- How does the story of the helix demonstrate the role of innovation and problem-solving in addressing environmental challenges?

Extended Essay Prompts

Native American Culture, First Foods, and Salmon Restoration: Examine the cultural, spiritual, and historical importance of salmon to Native American tribes such as the Yakama Nation. Discuss how salmon are considered a "First Food" and why restoring salmon populations is about more than environmental conservation. Analyze how the loss of salmon affects tribal traditions, identity, ceremonies, food sovereignty, and cultural survival. In your essay, explain why protecting and restoring salmon habitats can also help preserve Indigenous cultures, knowledge, and connections to future generations.

NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please register online or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.