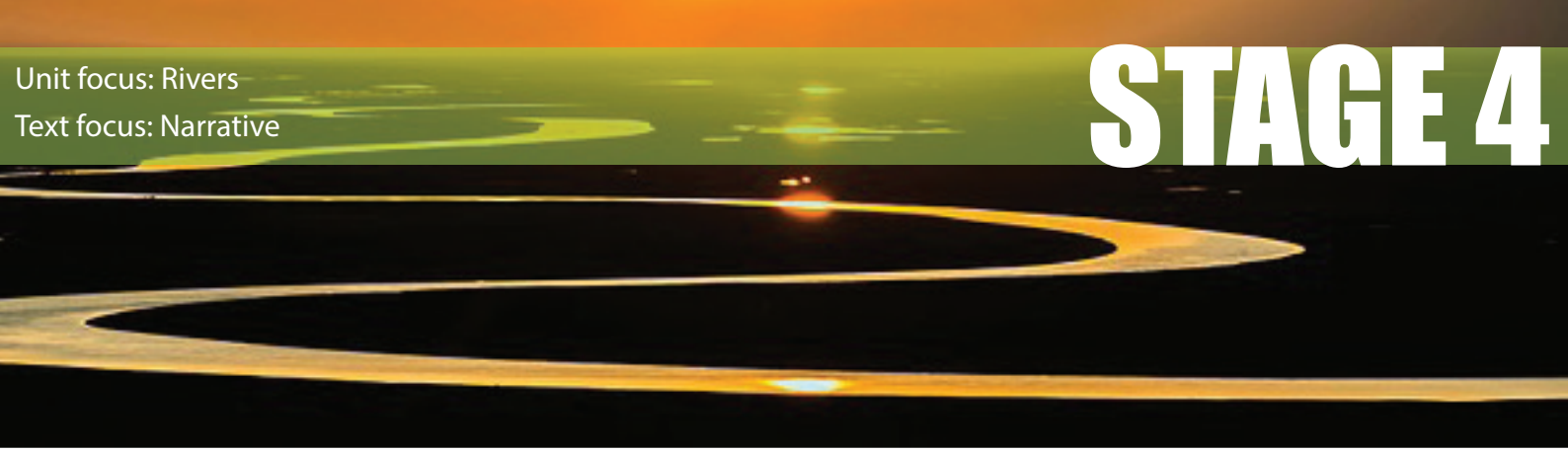


River Talk

Based on a traditional Indian folk tale.

High in the mountains, a stream began its long journey down to the sea. Fresh raindrops fell from the sky like transparent pearls. They fed the river and made it big and strong. In the beginning, the river remained small - more of a stream than anything else. It knew things would change as it raced along its course.

When the monsoon came, the river prepared itself. There would be more rain now, it knew. It would swell and overflow and race down into the plains below. Sure enough, the billowing black clouds and torrential rain soon arrived and nourished the river. It flashed down the mountain in a tumultuous barrage of water. It crashed into the plains below. Here, it joined the big river that meandered slowly across the land. Other smaller rivers were joining it too. Tributaries from other mountains or plains far away were all rushing to join the one big river as it headed slowly towards its final goal.

The river knew what was happening - the same thing happened again and again. It was a cycle. It knew it was only a matter of time before its sweet, crystal clear fresh water would be muddied. Even worse, it would eventually mix with the tasteless salty water of the ocean. All of the rivers felt the same and began to moan and grumble about the unfairness of it all.

“We can’t control where we go,” one river moaned to the others.

“It’s bad enough that I’ve had to merge with all of you here on the plains,” said another, bitterly.

“My pure mountain water will be sullied by the horrid saltwater of the ocean,” said a final river. Its voice was tinged with sadness.

Even though they moaned and whined, the water continued to flow along its course. After all, what else could the rivers do? They knew full well that they couldn’t flow backwards.

This bickering continued for hundreds of miles until, eventually, the ocean rose into sight. Flashes of bright white light reflected from the cresting waves and gulls circled overhead. By this point, the

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river had widened considerably and had slowed down. It took a long time for the water to travel the last few miles - long enough for them to raise their voices and complain much louder.

Suddenly, a strong voice rolled over the plains and caused ripples on the lazy river. “You have done nothing but grumble since you left your own little mountains,” the ocean boomed. “Yet look how far you have come. If you had stayed on your own and never merged, your journey would have ended by now and you would still be small and weak. Together, you have travelled hundreds of miles.”

The rivers considered the ocean’s point, but they were still unsure.

“Fine,” the ocean continued in its deep, echoing voice. “You do not have to merge anymore. Nobody can survive all by themselves without the help of others. But, if you think you are different, then go back to your mountain with your sweet, clear water.”

For a while it seemed like the rivers were considering doing just that. Soon they realised that they had no choice, and that everything moves forward. They also knew that the ocean was right. They needed each other to continue their journey onward. They knew that if they changed their course and flowed back into the plains, eventually they would dry up and wither away. By working together, the oceans and the rivers knew they could continue to flow forever.

INFERENCE FOCUS

1. How do you think the river felt about the monsoon? Explain why you think this.
2. Why couldn’t the rivers turn back and not flow towards the ocean?
3. Were the rivers happy about merging with each other on the plains?
4. What is the ocean’s message when he speaks to the rivers?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R	In which country does the folk tale originate?
S	As well as being a tale, what real world system does the story describe?
V	Find a word that describes the ocean’s voice.
S	What were the signs that they had reached the ocean?
V	Find and copy a phrase that describes how the river flowed down the mountain.
V	Which word means the rivers joined together?

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