

# A Single Source

## *Primary Substances - THINKING ABOUT THE WORLD*

This infographic explains the ancient Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus's revolutionary theory about the fundamental nature of reality, dating from around 624-546 BCE.

### **Thales's Core Belief: Water as the Primary Substance**

Thales proposed that water is "the first principle" - meaning it's the single, fundamental substance from which everything in the universe originates and is composed. This was groundbreaking because it was one of the first attempts to explain the natural world through a single, observable material rather than through mythology or supernatural explanations.

### **His Reasoning Process**

Thales developed this theory through careful observation of a local river island that kept growing in size. He noticed that:

- Water could transform into different states (liquid, solid ice, gaseous steam)
- Water seemed to be involved in the growth and nourishment of all living things
- The Earth itself appeared to float on water (in his cosmological model)

From these observations, he concluded that water must be the underlying substance that condenses and transforms to create all matter - earth, air, and everything else.

### **Historical Significance**

This theory marked a crucial shift in human thinking. Instead of attributing natural phenomena to gods or magic, Thales sought a rational, material explanation for the world's composition. While we now know his specific theory was incorrect, his approach of looking for underlying physical principles laid the groundwork for scientific thinking and philosophy.

His student Anaximenes later disagreed, proposing air rather than water as the primary substance, showing how this new rational approach encouraged debate and refinement of ideas.