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The Urban Water Cycle | National Geographic Society

When students hear the words "water cycle," many immediately think about the traditional water-cycle concepts taught in schools—evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. However, the water cycle also includes two important concepts often overlooked: infiltration and runoff. More importantly, given the development in human communities, our water cycle has been altered in numerous ways, but most especially in infiltration and runoff. In urban communities, concrete and pavement prevent water from soaking into the ground and is collected into storm wastewater systems. The rain no longer soaks into the ground to recharge groundwater reservoirs. Water may be brought to communities via aqueducts, and leave communities through sewage or storm-water systems. The water cycle looks quite different in these communities, and it is important for students to be aware of those key differences.

Watch this video of 6th grade students in San Diego, California—an urban, coastal community. The purpose of this classroom video is to hear student ideas about the urban water cycle and to think about key concepts you would teach to your students.

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Two key concepts of water management: infiltration and runoff

Freshwater sources come from a variety of different sources

Examples of surface sources include lakes, reservoirs and rivers.

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