

*Eco-story*

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# How the river changes



It's a beautiful day. Alice has been riding her bike through the park and now she's sitting on the riverbank watching the water run by. Alice's thoughts are running too and she remembers reading in a book that a man who lived over two thousand years ago once said: **no man ever steps in the same river twice!** Alice remembers that this man was called **Heraclitus**.

And what Heraclitus meant was that **everything changes all the time**: the leaves on the trees, the days and nights, children as they grow up.

And if Heraclitus was right, the mountains, air and rivers are changing all the time too. Alice is changing too, thought Alice. If only Heraclitus were here to see **how the world has changed over the past two thousand years!**

Alice imagines what it would be like to talk to him.

"Of course, in your day, the river was a bit different."

"The water was definitely cleaner..." says Heraclitus "But that's

not the only difference... In my day, almost all the river water stayed between the river banks... Now, with all these houses and all the people who live in them, I get the idea that most of the water heads off in different directions”.

“Well yes, it flows out of our taps... I’ve learned a lot about water at school, you know?” says Alice.

“Hmm, but you know that **water doesn’t originate in taps**, don’t you?” asks Heraclitus, doubtful for some reason. “Did they teach you that water comes from clouds and glaciers? That it’s a **gift of nature**?” “Of course” replies Alice “When it rains, the water falls and when the weather is hot, it rises back up again. Up and down all the time, from the seas and lakes, from the streams and rivers... **It never stops!**”

“Yes, and that’s the way it’s always been” says Heraclitus “but you need to really use your imagination to think about how far water can travel, because clouds fly and sometimes they carry the water a long way away from the river”.

“But we transfer water into pipes, transport it to our homes and bottle it...” says Alice.

“And we can’t always return the water we use to the river. This is called **dispersion**” says Heraclitus, shaking his head. “When I water my vegetable patch, the lettuce drinks some of the water and some of it seeps into the ground, travelling around the world...”

Try chasing water! You can’t catch it! Remember: no man ever

steps in the same river twice! **Even the water that comes from glaciers is destined to become less and less, and maybe even to disappear.**”

Alice laughs as she imagines old Heraclitus holding a watering can and chasing water through the lettuce patch.

“And of course” adds Heraclitus **“No water, no garden...”**

Alice reflects on his words, no water, no garden: of course! **We don't only use water to drink and wash. It's thanks to water that all the food we need to survive is grown.**

“You see” says Heraclitus **“It's no mere coincidence that your towns and cities are built next to rivers: every living thing depends on water,** but rivers change. Sometimes they carry too much water and that's a problem. Other times they don't carry enough and that's another problem... Not to mention the fact that there are places where there's no water at all”.

“But what can we do?” asks Alice.

“Well, first of all **we need to make sure that everyone has access to the water they need:** all you have to do is turn on the tap and you have as much water as you want. Imagine what would happen if the river dried up and the park became a desert... **The water cycle also depends on how we build our towns and cities.** Where there are trees, for example, the water is retained for longer.

We all know that everything changes and that **we have to work**

**alongside nature** if we want a world that is fair, respectful of everyone's rights and welfare".

Alice closes her eyes for a moment and imagines that all the plants around her have disappeared. Oh, what an awful thought! She opens her eyes again and Heraclitus is gone. His words, however, stay with her. They hang in the air for a while and then move to float on the river, which will carry them away, to the sea, then to the clouds and the wind. They'll take a trip around the world.

Alice climbs back on her bike and heads off between the trees in the park, towards home.

