In modern America, we have access to clean, fresh water every day. Each time we turn on the tap, plumbing systems bring this important resource into our homes. Despite its importance for life, though, fresh water is extremely rare. Less than 3 percent of the water found on Earth is fresh water, and the remaining 97 percent is salt water, such as what is found in the ocean.

Most of the world's fresh water is not easily accessible to humans. Approximately 69 percent of Earth's freshwater is locked away in the form of ice in glaciers and polar ice caps. Another 30 percent of Earth's fresh water is under the surface in the form of groundwater. That leaves only about 1 percent of Earth's fresh water available for human use.
Unfortunately, the available surface fresh water is not equally distributed throughout the world. Brazil, Russia, Canada, Indonesia, China, Colombia and the United States have most of the world's surface freshwater resources. As a result, approximately one-fifth of the world's population lives in water-scarce areas. On average, each person here receives less than 35,315 cubic feet of water a year. This lack of water affects the economic development and politics of different areas.

**Safe Drinking Water**

Because freshwater resources are unequally distributed across the globe, many human populations do not have access to safe drinking water. According to the United Nations, 2.1 billion people around the globe lacked access to safe drinking water in 2017. Instead, they had access only to contaminated water. Populations drinking dirty water are at increased risk of diarrhea, cholera, dysentery and other diseases. Lack of access to clean water leads to more than 3 million deaths every year.

As a result, providing improved water sources to developing countries is an important goal for international organizations. These groups have had much success. Between 1990 and 2015, 2.6 billion people worldwide gained access to improved water resources as a result of international efforts. The remaining human populations still without access to clean water are concentrated mostly in Africa and Asia. They represent nearly 1 billion people.

**Fishing And Agriculture**

Access to fresh water is also important for economic development. For example, freshwater sources enable the development of fisheries. People around the world harvest fish from these habitats, providing enough animal protein to feed 158 million people worldwide. These fisheries are both a source of food for local fishermen and a source of income for traders.

Fresh water is also an important resource in other economic activities, such as agriculture. According to one estimate, about 70 percent of the world's fresh water is used for agriculture. Farmers around the world use irrigation to transport water from surface and groundwater sources to their fields. These agricultural activities involve over 1 billion people worldwide and generate over $2.4 trillion every year. In the future, demand for agricultural fresh water will only increase as global populations grow. According to one estimate, freshwater
demand will increase by 50 percent by 2050. This increase in water use will put further strain on Earth's limited freshwater supplies. It will make access to fresh water even more important.

**Relations Between Nations**

The fight over fresh water can already be seen today in international politics. For example, Ethiopia and Egypt have long fought over Nile water resources in Africa. The Nile River is an important waterway that supplies nearly 85 percent of Egypt's water. However, approximately 85 percent of the Nile's water originates in Ethiopia. Because Ethiopia is planning to dam part of the river to generate electricity, Egypt is concerned that it might lose access to some of the Nile's waters. The disagreement has not yet turned into open conflict. However, it is clear that securing this important resource will define Ethiopian-Egyptian relations for many years to come.

Conflicts over water resources are common throughout the world. Even in the United States, where freshwater is relatively abundant, different populations fight over the use of fresh water. One major debate concerns the Colorado River system. This water system supplies water to Arizona, California, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Because of a drought that has reduced water flow in this river system, these seven states need to decide how to reduce water usage in order to preserve the river. Population growth and climate change will create additional challenges. These conflicts over water will continue to occur, and with greater frequency, in the future.
Quiz

1 Which answer choice describes two CENTRAL ideas in the article?

1. In modern America, we have access to clean, fresh water every day.
2. On average, each person here receives less than 35,315 cubic feet of water a year.
3. Access to fresh water is also important for economic development.
4. Conflicts over water resources are common throughout the world.

(A) 1 and 2
(B) 1 and 3
(C) 2 and 4
(D) 3 and 4

2 Which statement would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?

(A) Only 1 percent of Earth's fresh water is easily accessible to humans and that available water is not distributed equally everywhere.
(B) People in the United States have the convenience of getting fresh water through plumbing systems that brings water to the tap.
(C) The Colorado River system has experienced a drought and now seven different states will have a reduced flow of fresh water.
(D) Salt water makes up about 97 percent of the Earth's water and this type of water is mostly found in the ocean.

3 According to the article, WHY did Ethiopian-Egyptian relations become even more strained recently?

(A) Ethiopia has just gotten control of 85 percent of the Nile River, even though it is where Egypt gets 85 percent of its fresh water.
(B) Ethiopia has engaged in open conflict with Egypt because Ethiopia is trying to create electricity with the power of the Nile River.
(C) Egypt is worried about how they will be affected if Ethiopia goes through with its plans to dam part of the Nile River.
(D) Egypt thinks that they use the Nile River more than Ethiopia and believes they should have more access to its water.
4 How did international efforts affect people's access to clean water?

(A) They tried to improve people's access to clean water but it was impossible to make a dent in the problem.

(B) They completely succeeded in ensuring that everyone around the world has access to clean water.

(C) They worked tirelessly to reduce problems with access to clean water but it only had a small effect.

(D) They dramatically increased the number of people who now have access to clean water.