

The Rio Grande

Although not the longest river in America, the Rio Grande is one of the most important. But, unlike other significant rivers, it is not used for shipping. In fact, oceangoing ships cannot navigate the waters. No, what makes the Rio Grande so important is its location. Since 1846, it has been the official border of Texas and Mexico.

Rio Grande Geography

The Rio Grande is either the fourth or fifth longest river system in North America. It all depends on how it is measured. Because the river twists so much, it occasionally changes course. And these course shifts can cause it to be longer or shorter. At its last official measure, the Rio Grande clocked in at 1,896 miles. The river starts in Colorado and extends downward to the Gulf of Mexico.

Downward is the best way of describing it too. Not only does the river extend south, but it also starts in the mountains and gets lower and lower in elevation as it extends to the Gulf.

Its name is Spanish for the “Big River,” but the Rio Grande is actually known as Rio Bravo in Mexico. “Bravo” translates as “furious,” so the name makes sense. Because of its twists and turns, it certainly does seem to be angrier than most rivers!

The Rio Grande Today

The Rio Grande today is mostly used as a source of drinking water. Sadly, much of the water has been drained from the river. Parts of the river are almost dry! This is because people use more water from the river than the river can get back from rain and other sources. Experts are working to correct this, though, with hopes of restoring the river to its past strength.

Today, the river is important as a source of water for Texans and Mexicans. More important, it is a symbol of cooperation between two nations. Though borders like the Rio Grande separate nations, they are also shared spaces. The Rio Grande is therefore a symbol of friendship and peace between two peoples.

1) According to the passage, why is the Rio Grande so important?

- A. It is a source of drinking water for most of the United States.
- B. It is the border of Texas and Mexico.
- C. It is the longest river system in the United States.
- D. It is known by two different names.

2) In paragraph 3, the author most likely writes that “downward is the best way of describing it too” to

- A. prove that the Rio Grande’s water levels have gone down recently
- B. argue that the Rio Grande has changed shape over the years
- C. highlight the fact that the Rio Grande flows south and from high elevations
- D. explain why the Rio Grande is known as the Rio Bravo down in Mexico

3) Based on its use in paragraph 4, the word **furious** most nearly means

- A. angry
- B. large
- C. twisted
- D. dry

4) According to the passage, the Rio Grande has endpoints in

- A. Texas and the Gulf of Mexico
- B. New Mexico and Colorado
- C. Texas and Mexico
- D. Colorado and the Gulf of Mexico

5) At the beginning of the passage, we learn that the Rio Grande is "one of the most important" rivers in America. Can you think of another important landform that exists where you live? What makes it so important?

6) In paragraph 5, the author explains that the Rio Grande is slowly going dry. What do you think would happen if the river ever went completely dry? Why? Explain your predictions below.

7) Based on the information in the passage, explain in your own words why the Rio Grande is “either the fourth or fifth longest river system in North America.” Why can’t we say with certainty that it is only the fourth longest and not the fifth longest, for example?

8) In the final paragraph of the passage, the author says that the Rio Grande is “a symbol of cooperation” between Mexico and the United States, but also recognizes that the river divides the two countries. Based on the passage and your outside knowledge, do you think the river is more uniting or dividing? How do you think the river symbolizes cooperation? How do you think it symbolizes division? Explain.
