Name _____

All About Drought

What is a drought?

A drought is when a place has less PRECIPITATION than usual for a long time. That means a place is getting LESS snow and rain than it normally does. During a drought, the rivers, streams, and lakes in an area might have less water than normal. They might even dry up. Some places in a drought may become drier, hotter, or dustier than usual.

Not every place that is dry and dusty is having a drought. And some places are in drought even though they have green plants and rain storms. Whether or not a place is in drought depends on what's NORMAL for that place. If a place usually gets LOTS and LOTS of rain in winter, and this year it only got a little rain, then that place might be in a drought. But if a place usually gets a LITTLE rain each winter, and this year it got a little rain, then that place might NOT be in a drought.

Why do droughts happen?

The Earth is surrounded by air. This is called the ATMOSPHERE. Changes in the temperature, moisture, or winds in the atmosphere can all result in less rain and snow in a place than usual.
Living things can also play a role in drought. The more water plants and animals use (like a grass lawn soaking up water through its roots, or a thirsty person taking a drink), the less water there is in rivers and streams and other bodies of water in that area.

What impact can droughts have?

All living things need water to live. When there isn't enough water for the plants and animals in an area, they can stop growing, get sick, or even die. Humans use water for all sorts of things, from drinking to bathing to washing dishes. When there's a drought, the people in that area often have to cut back on how much water they use, or rely on water shipped from far away. A dry landscape can be more vulnerable to other natural disasters, such as wildfires.

What can we do to protect against drought?

We can't stop droughts from happening. Humans can't make it rain or snow. But we can reduce the impact of a drought by being careful about how we use our water. We can do things like replace grass lawns with plants that need less water, and only use as much water as we need to bathe and wash things. Small steps can help us keep plants and animals healthy when water is in shorter supply.