

# STUDENT'S HANDOUT



## Background Information

Although water is essential to life, more than a billion people on the planet have no access to clean drinking water. This serious situation generates conflicts for the acquisition of water. Bolivia is one of 25 countries receiving the majority of CIDA's bilateral aide (from government to government).



## Instructions

Here are two letters sent from Bolivia by a girl whose name is Genevieve. She sent them to her parents on the two different occasions that she visited the country. Read both letters carefully, and then answer the questionnaire to verify your comprehension.



Cochabamba, Bolivia, January 2000

Dear Dad and Mom,

I hope you're both doing well. I enjoy staying here with my host family. In Cochabamba the situation is pretty difficult. I wonder if you've heard anything about what's happening here, such as in your local newspapers. The Bolivian people are not very happy, but don't worry about me, I'm doing just fine.

Thousands of people have taken to the streets to demonstrate their discontent. My host father has told me that they have to cut into the little pleasures they used to enjoy daily as a family, because water has become so expensive. Imagine having to pay so much for running water! These last few days, the price of water has gone up 300%! This represents more than a third of my host father's income. What would we do in Canada, if we had to spend so much money just to have access to potable water?

Bolivia is indebted and considered the poorest country in South America. My host father has explained that the Bolivian government wanted to borrow money. The largest international credit institution, the International Monetary Fund, declared that they would lend them \$600 million on the condition that water services be privatized in the Cochabamba region. They put forward this condition so that the government could reimburse its debts instead of paying for the water services for the population.

The international consortium Agua del Tunari has obtained management rights for the services and the water reserves for the region. Water is now much more expensive, and the services are apparently not any better. In the more impoverished regions, some people no longer receive water. These people must buy water containers, which are even more expensive.

I find it unfair that the poorest people don't have access to potable water, and that they must spend such a large part of their income just to drink, wash, and cook. Water is essential to life.

I hope my letter will make you reflect on this condition. I'm discovering many things, and I can't wait to tell you more about it when I get back home.

Your Loving Daughter,  
Genevieve

Cochabamba, Bolivia, January 2005

Dear parents,

Yes, I'm back in Cochabamba where I visited for the first time back in the year 2000. It was just fantastic to see my host family and my friends again! Emotions are running high!

Remember the letter I wrote you back in 2000, concerning the problems of the high cost of water, the general discontent brought about by the privatization of their water services, and the subsequent sale to a group of private companies. What I hadn't mentioned then is that the citizens were able to revoke the contract for the water services of their city, which had been sold to a large international consortium. Imagine that the Bolivian government is now working to establish a sustainable public water service. This means that the government is re-appropriating these services, and will keep them as a public service. "This is good news", my host Bolivian father told me. People here were extremely relieved.

Remember that within South America, Bolivia has the most limited water treatment and distribution system. Correspondingly, Bolivia has the third highest infant mortality rate in the world! There remains much to do...

On the first day of my arrival, I was stopped by a man who had noticed the small Canadian flag I had stitched on my back pack. He told me that Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency, was contributing to a program for water treatment facilities in which he was participating. This program aims to double Bolivia's access to potable water and treatment facilities in the next few years.

There is a sense of hope! People here proudly remember their fight in the year 2000, which was proudly dubbed "The Water Wars". The population became aware that they could make things change.

Greetings and kisses,  
Genevieve



## Bolivia – Technical file

**Constitutional capital:** Sucre, center of the country's commercial and industrial activities

**Cultural and administrative capital:** La Paz, government headquarters

**Population:** 7.9 million (2000)

**Area:** 1 million km<sup>2</sup>

**Official language:** Spanish

**Principal Language:** Spanish (43 %)

**Other languages:** Approximately 40 different aboriginal languages, quechua (36.4 %), aymara (22.5 %), guarani (0.2 %) and chiquito (0.2 %)

**Political System:** Republic composed of 9 departments

**Constitutional articles (language):** art. 6, 116 et 171 of the 1994 constitution

**Language laws:** supreme decree 23036 of January 20 1992,

Law 1565 of July 7 1994 on educational reform, sovereign decree 23036 of September 9, 1994 code for penal procedure (2001).

**Geographical characteristics:** landlocked, Andes cordillera to the west (20% of territory), plains to the east.



Student's name : \_\_\_\_\_ Class : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reading Comprehension Evaluation Correspondence from Bolivia

1- What was happening, in January 2000, with the public water services in Cochabamba, Bolivia?

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2- How did the citizens react to this?

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3- Why did the Bolivian government make this decision?

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4- What are the impacts of water privatization on the population in the Cochabamba region?

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5- Where is Bolivia located?

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6- Which two elements in Genevieve's second letter allows her to say that there is hope?

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7. What changed in Bolivia between the year 2000 and 2005?

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8- What would you think if you had pay so much for your water?

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AN INITIATIVE OF THE  
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