Primary Source Material

The Spanish Entrada

The Akimel O'odham (Pima Indians) have resided along the Gila River for centuries. They were fishermen and farmers, using water from the river for irrigation. They also gathered wild plant foods as an additional or emergency food. The first Europeans to visit the Pimas were the Spanish. Father Eusebio Kino was the earliest European explorer to meet the Gila River Pimas. His first visit was in 1694. On his last trip to the Gila in March 1699 Kino wrote:

> **All its inhabitants are fishermen, and have many nets and other tackle with which they fish all the year, sustaining themselves with the abundant fish and with their maize, beans, and calabashes.**
> (*Kino's Historical Memoir of Pimeria Alta*, edited and annotated by Herbert Eugene Bolton. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948:197)

The Anza Expedition to California passed through the land of the Pimas in 1775. Traveling with the expedition, Father Francisco Garces wrote the following description of the villages of the Pimas:

> **In all these pueblos they raise large crops of wheat, some of corn, cotton, calabashes, etc., to which end they have constructed good irrigating canals . . . Go dressed do these Indians in blankets of cotton which they fabricate and others of wool, either of their own sheep or obtained from Moqui [Hopi].**
> (*On the Trail of a Spanish Pioneer*, by Elliott Coues. New York: Francis P. Harper, 1900:107-109)

The Mexican Era

The lands of the Pimas moved from Spanish to Mexican control in 1820 as a result of the Mexican Revolution. There was very little contact between the Gila River Pimas and the Mexican government, but this period did bring the first visits by Americans. The first Americans to enter the Gila River Valley were fur trappers hunting beaver. James Ohio Pattie was the first of the trappers to travel through Arizona in 1825 -1826. Of his visit to the Gila, he stated:

> **On the 25th, we arrived at an Indian village situated on the south bank of the river... The Indians seemed disposed to be**

friendly to us. They are, to a considerable degree, cultivators, raising wheat, corn, and cotton, which they manufacture into cloths.
(*Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie* by James Ohio Pattie, edited by Richard Batman. Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1988:55)

The American Period

The American Army's first contact with the Gila River Pimas occurred in 1846 due to the Mexican-American War. Two army troops passed through the Pima Villages on their way to California: General Stephen Watts Kearny's Army of the West; and Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke's Mormon Battalion. In 1848, as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo at the end of that war, the Pima's land north of the Gila River was given to the United States. Their land south of the river remained in Mexico.

The next year, in 1849, the Gold Rush brought a large number of travelers passing through the land of the Pimas on their way to California. The Pima Villages became an important rest and supply stop along the difficult southern road to California. Many individuals traveling through left written records of their visits. Benjamin Butler Harris traveled this route in 1849 and wrote of the Pimas:

Pima Indians met the men ten or fifteen miles from the [Pima] village with gourds of water, roasted pumpkin, and green corn. Serving these, they hurried forward for relieving the others . . . Next morning, we descended the rich Gila bottom through a dense forest of mesquite to the Pima Village, meeting relief parties of Indians along the way.
(*The Gila Trail: The Texas Argonauts and the California Gold Rush* by Benjamin Butler Harris, edited and annotated by Richard Dillon. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960: 80)

The land south of the Gila River became part of the United States through the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. All of the Pima's land was now in the United States. Major William H. Emory visited the Pimas as the U.S. Boundary Survey Commissioner in 1856. The following description was part of his official report:

After leaving these wells you again travel for twenty-nine miles along and occasionally touching the river; you also pass through several Indian villages of the Pimos (sic) and

Maricopas. The former are further advanced in the art of agriculture, and are surrounded with more comforts, than any . . . Indian tribe I have ever seen. Besides being great warriors, they are good . . . farmers, and work laboriously in the field . . . we found lands fenced in, and irrigated by many miles of acequias, and our eyes were gladdened with the sight of rich fields of wheat ripening for the harvest--a view differing from anything we had seen since leaving the Atlantic States. They grow cotton, sugar, peas, wheat, and corn . . .
(*Report on the United States and Mexican Boundary Survey:* by William H. Emory. Washington: Cornelius Wendell, Printer, 1857:117)

The Southern Overland Trail through the Pima Villages continued to be an important route to California. In the late 1850s it became the route of the Butterfield Overland Mail as well as the Federal Wagon Road. In 1864, J. Ross Browne, a famous world traveler and author, traveled this route and wrote about the crops grown by the Pimas:

In 1858, the first year of the Overland Mail Line, the [Pima's] surplus crop of wheat was 100,000 pounds, which was purchased by the (mail) Company; also a large quantity of beans, . . . and a vast quantity of pumpkins, squashes, and melons.

That year [1859] they sold 250,000 pounds of wheat and a large supply of melons, pumpkins, and beans. In 1860 they sold 400,000 pounds of wheat-all the mail company would purchase. They had more, and furnished the Government and private teamsters . . .
(*Adventures in Apache Country* by J. Ross Browne. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974: 110)

The Late 1800s: Government Reports and Pima Oral History

As word of the rich crop lands of the Gila Valley grew, Anglo farmers began settling in areas upriver from the Pimas. Residents of the town of Florence, Arizona, first began diverting Gila River water in 1868. The U. S. Special Indian agent of Arizona Territory, J. M. Stout, wrote about the effect of diverting water in 1871 in his report to the U.S. government:

> **As a matter of course, our Indians are much dissatisfied and blame the settlers who are above us for taking away their water. On Sunday morning last, Chin-kum, a chief of one of the lower villages, and one of the best chiefs on the reserve, came to me and said that for many years he and his people had "lived from what they planted," but now they had no water; white men up the river had taken it from them.**
> (*The Changing Ways of Southwestern Indians* edited by Albert H. Schroeder. Glorieta, New Mexico: Rio Grande Press, Inc. 1973: 248-249)

As more settlers arrived, they needed even more water. Mormon settlers in the Safford Valley diverted water in 1874 (Dobyns: 50-52) and in 1887, the Florence Canal Company was formed to build a diversion dam on the river.

An elder in each village recorded Pima history during this period. They carved notches and markings on a large wooden rod to help them recall important events. An anthropologist who visited the Pimas in 1901 reported information from two calendar sticks. Calendar stick history recorded these events of the late 1800s:

> **1872-73 - For several years the Pimas had had little water to irrigate their fields and were beginning to suffer from actual want . . .**
>
> **1898-99 - *Blackwater* - There was no crop this year.**
>
> **1899-1900 - A woman at Blackwater was fatally bitten by a rattlesnake. (This woman had gone far out on the desert to search for mesquite beans, as she was without food; indeed the whole community was starving because of the failure of the crops owing to the lack of water in the river for their ditches.)**
> (*The Pima Indians* by Frank Russell. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1975: 54, 65)

The situation was so serious that the Pima Indian Agency requested and was given $30,000 per year to purchase wheat for the Pimas. The amount of wheat purchased was the same as the extra amount sold by Pima farmers in 1859 when water still flowed in the river. (Ortiz: 171).

20th Century Accounts

The situation remained the same into the 20th century. Anthropologist Frank Russell lived with the Pimas from 1901 to 1902. In his report to the Bureau of Ethnology, Russell made the following observations:

> **The once famous grassy plains that made the Pima villages a haven of rest for cavalry and wagon-train stock are now barren . . .**
>
> **Mats were formerly made by the Pimas of the cane, . . . that grew in abundance along the Gila until the water supply became too scant for the maintenance of this plant.**
>
> (Russell: 84-85, 147)

The construction of Coolidge Dam (San Carlos Project) in 1930 offered hope of a solution to the water problems of the Pimas. Piman George Webb, who farmed on the reservation during this time, recalled this period of history:

> **This dam was built up in a canyon of the Gila River, and its purpose was to conserve water especially for the use of the Pima Indians. . . When the dam was completed there would be plenty of water. And there was. For about five years. Then the water began to run short again. After another five years it stopped altogether.**
>
> (*A Pima Remembers* by George Webb. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1959:123)

In 1959, Mr. Webb remembered this about the Gila River:

> **In the old days, on hot summer nights, a low mist would spread over the river and the sloughs. Then the sun would come up and the mist would disappear. . . The red-wing blackbirds would sing in the trees and fly down to look for bugs along the ditches. Their song always means that there is water close by as they will not sing if there is not water splashing somewhere.**
>
> **The green of those Pima fields spread along the river for many miles in the old days when there was plenty of water. Now the river is an empty bed full of sand. Now you can stand in that same place and see the wind tearing pieces of bark off the cottonwood trees along the dry ditches. The dead trees stand there like white bones. The red-wing blackbirds have gone somewhere else.** (Webb: 124-125)

The Gila River continued to be an empty bed full of sand and lack of water was constantly a concern for the Akimel O'odham (Pimas). A speech by Gila River Indian Community Governor Alexander Lewis, Sr. in 1973 gives his view on the situation of the community:

> **In the past our people worked the land. But then it happened that the water was gone and no longer could any thing grow again on their land because gone was the water, and we [must] see things differently now.**
>
> **In the past the O'odham were able to live satisfactorily on the crops they harvested from their land. Today this is not possible, for no longer can we work the land as in the past. For this reason the O'odham recognized the need for education: the need to learn new skills . . .**
>
> **All this will change our way of life, how we live, and how we will live in the future.**
>
> (*Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 10.* Edited by Alfonso Ortiz. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1983: 213-214)

21st Century: Restoration?

Today, the Gila River is still a dry bed through the Gila River Indian Community, but the water situation has improved. In 2004, the Gila River Indian Community signed a water agreement with the United States government; the largest Indian water rights settlement in the United States. The result of almost 80 years of negotiations, the Arizona Water Settlement Act of 2004 guarantees the Akimel O'odham 653,500 square feet of water every year and $400 million to help upgrade their farming irrigation system. However the water will come from the Colorado River through Central Arizona Project canals, not in the Gila River.

The O'odham first petitioned the federal government for the conservation of their water rights in the early 1900s. Over 100 years after the loss of their water, the United States Congress is finally returning water to the Gila River Akimel O'odham (Pimas). Showing the importance of water to his people, Richard Narcia, Governor of the Gila River Indian Community, stated at his tribe's Water Settlement Celebration in 2005:

> **Water, from my perspective is about culture. It's about who we are. We are the River People, Akimel O'odham.**
>
> "A River Flowing Back to 'River People'" *The Arizona Republic* (April 30, 2005): B6.)

In March, 2017, thirteen years after the water settlement, the Gila River Indian Community signed an agreement with the City of Phoenix to store 3,800 acre-feet of the city's water in the tribe's aquifer. Phoenix will have water to use in case of a future shortage and the water will be stored in a section of the long-dry Gila River near the Community's capital of Sacaton. The agreement may not provide enough water to permanently refill the Gila River but it will restore groundwater beneath the river bed and allow life to return to the desert that surrounds it. The willow and mesquite trees will once again grow along the banks, providing shelter and homes to the birds and animals of the desert. After the signing of the agreement, Gila River Governor Stephen Roe Lewis stated:

For us, few words can explain how significant it is to see our water come back to us."

"Gila River Indian Community Agrees to Water-storage Deal with Phoenix" *The Arizona Republic* (March 21, 2017).

Student Outline Name _____

As you read the primary source material, write down important facts about the Akimel O'odham (Pimas) and/or the Gila River.

I. The Spanish Entrada

Date _____ Source _____

Fact 1: _____

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_____

Date _____ Source _____

Fact 2: _____

_____

_____

II. The Mexican Era

Date _____ Source _____

Fact 1: _____

_____

_____

III. The American Period

Date _____ Source _____

Fact 1: _____

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Date _____ Source _____

Fact 2: _____

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Date _____ Source _____

Fact 3: _____

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IV. The Late 1800s

Date _____ Source _____

Fact 1: _____

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Date _____ Source _____

Fact 2: _____

_____

_____

V. 20th Century Accounts

Date _____ Source _____

Fact 1: _____

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Date _____ Source _____

Fact 2: _____

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Date _____ Source _____

Fact 3: _____

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VI. 21st Century Accounts

Date _____ Source _____

Fact 1: _____

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Date _____ Source _____

Fact 2: _____

_____

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Name_____ **Student Summary Worksheet**

A. The Spanish Entrada

Water in river: corn, wheat, beans – YES / NO

B. The Mexican Era

Water in river: corn, wheat, beans – YES / NO

C. The American Period

Water in river: corn, wheat, beans – YES / NO

D. The Late 1800s

Water in river: corn, wheat, beans – YES / NO

E. 20th Century Accounts

Water in river: corn, wheat, beans – YES / NO

F. The 21st Century

Water in river: corn, wheat, beans – YES / NO / MAYBE?

Student Summary ANSWER KEY

1. YES
2. YES
3. YES
4. NO
5. NO
6. NO/MAYBE