



*The journey of a river*

L.O.

To know how a river is formed

To understand that rivers have different sections as they flow.

This week's lesson follows the course of a river from its source to its end. There is a diagram for you to label – it has been put onto Word, so that you can edit it on screen or print it out. The vocabulary you need is included throughout these pages and there is a glossary on the last page.

If you would like to see what the River Thames looks like from beginning to end, follow this link: [Thames](#)

This is an amateur video, so the camera work is shaky at times, but it gives a good impression.

# The journey of a river...



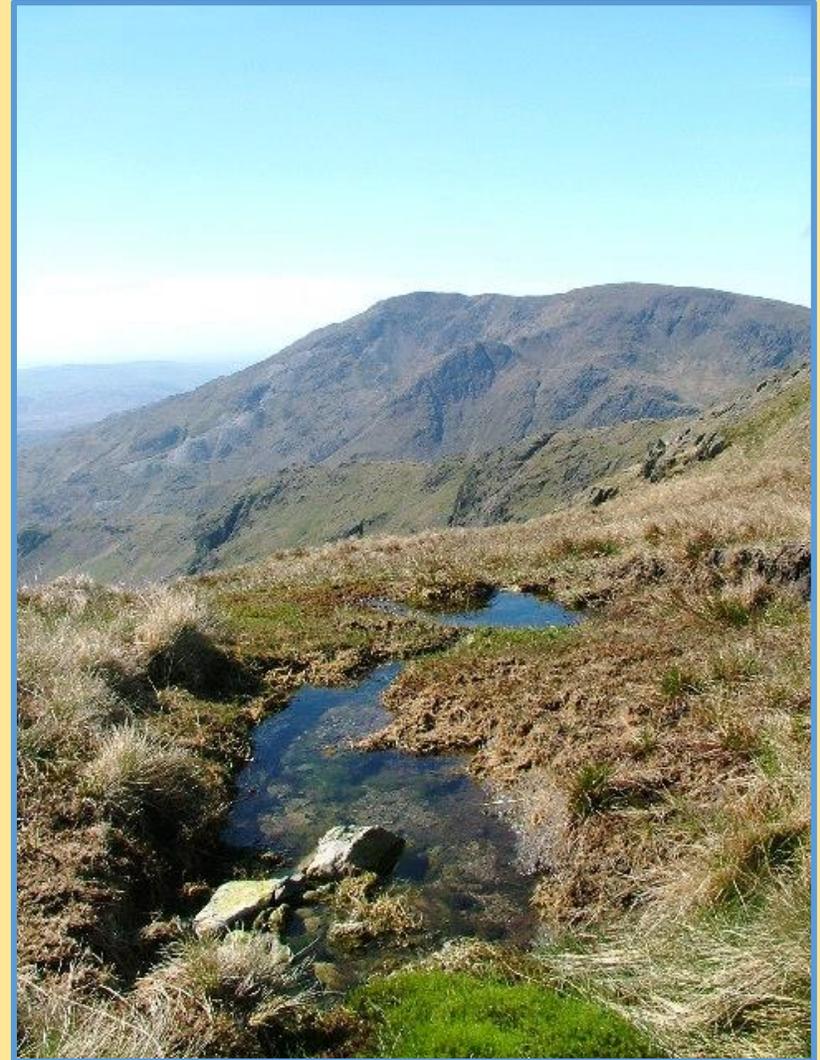
We are going to look at where and how rivers start, and the journey they take across land to reach a larger body of water, such as the sea!

In Kidlington we have the River Cherwell, which joins the River Thames in Oxford. Just think, the river water that is a five-minute walk from school finishes flowing through London.

# Where and how do rivers begin?

The River Thames begins at a spring in the Cotswold Hills – but where, generally, do rivers begin?

How do they change from tiny hill streams to the major waterways we see?



# Where and how do rivers begin?

Clouds release their rain over the hills.

Most of this soaks into the ground to become groundwater.

Some groundwater comes to the surface to form springs.

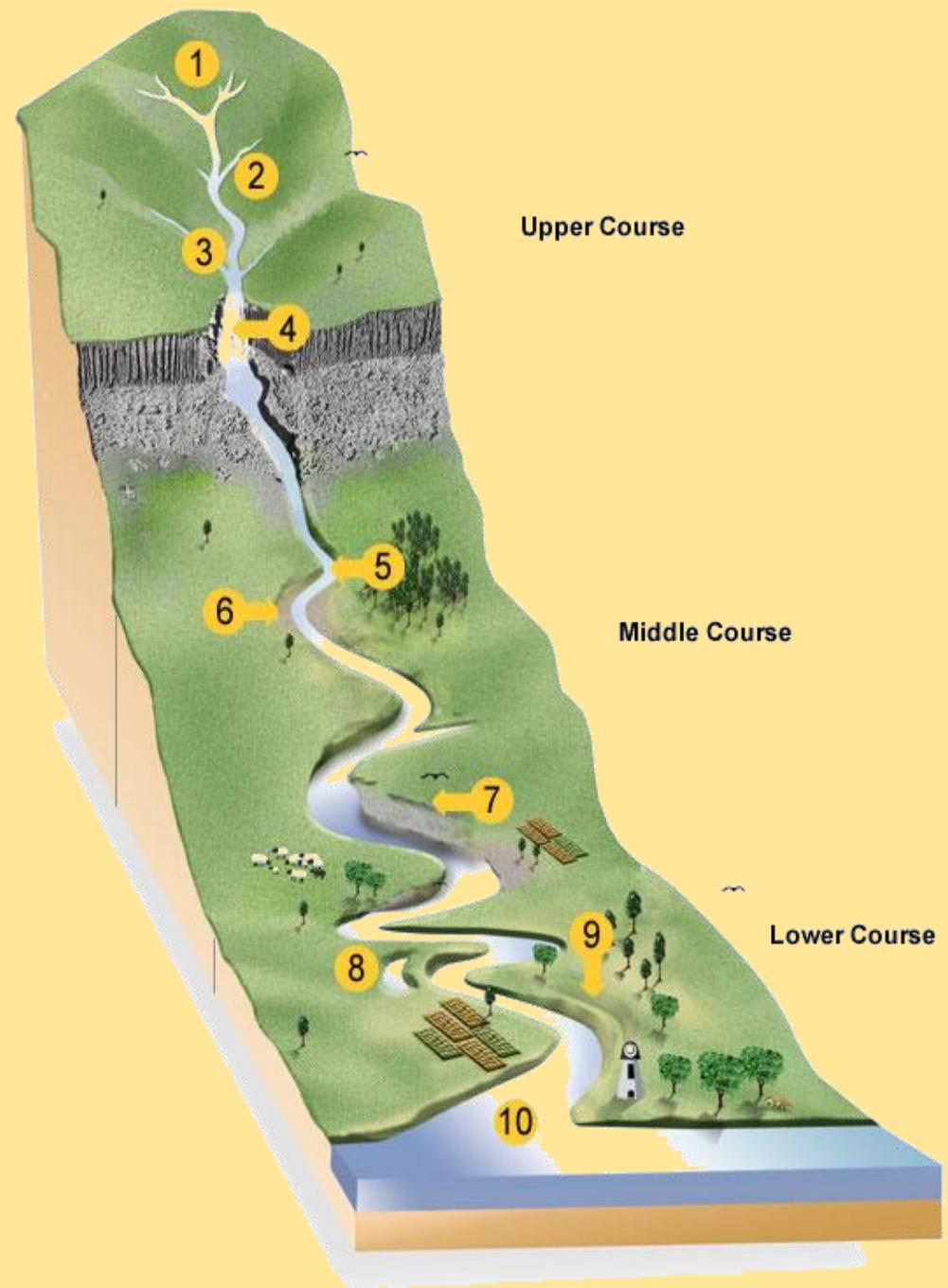
Springs join together to make streams.

As the streams trickle down the hillside, they join together, getting bigger as they go, until they become rivers.



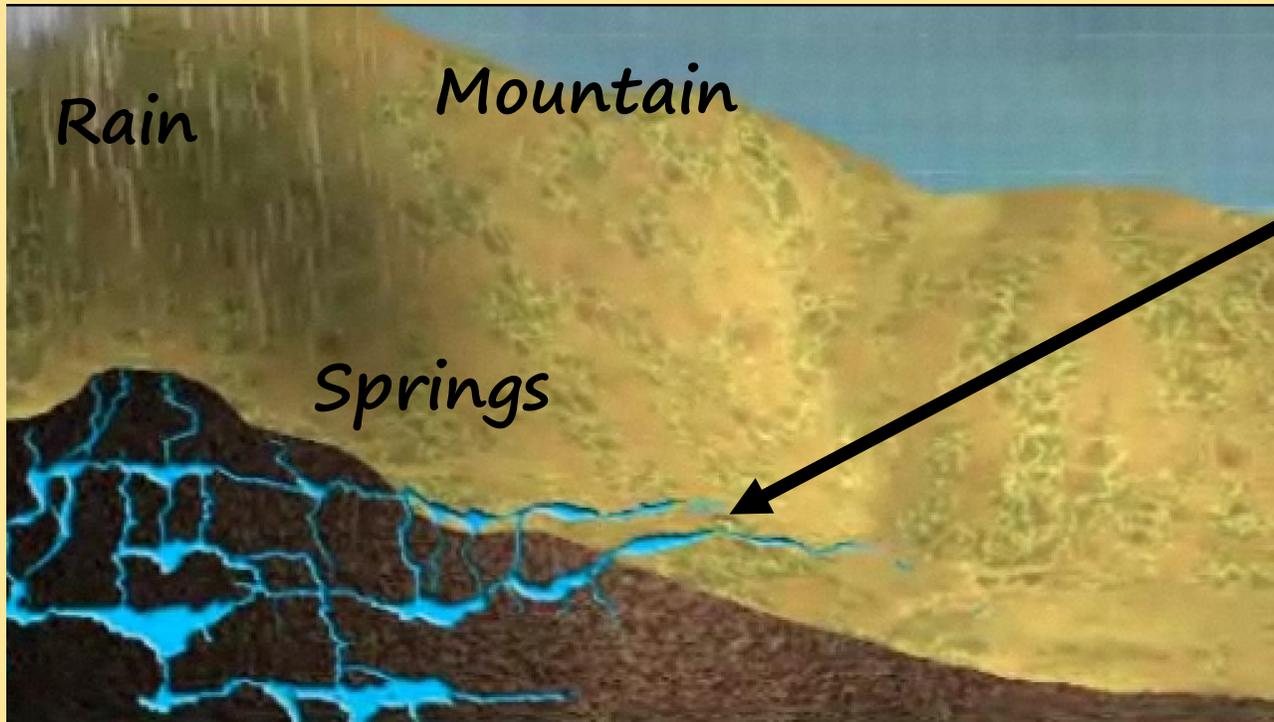
# The sections of a river

The journey of a river can be divided into three sections.



# The upper course

The upper course of a river starts at the source. This is where a river begins.



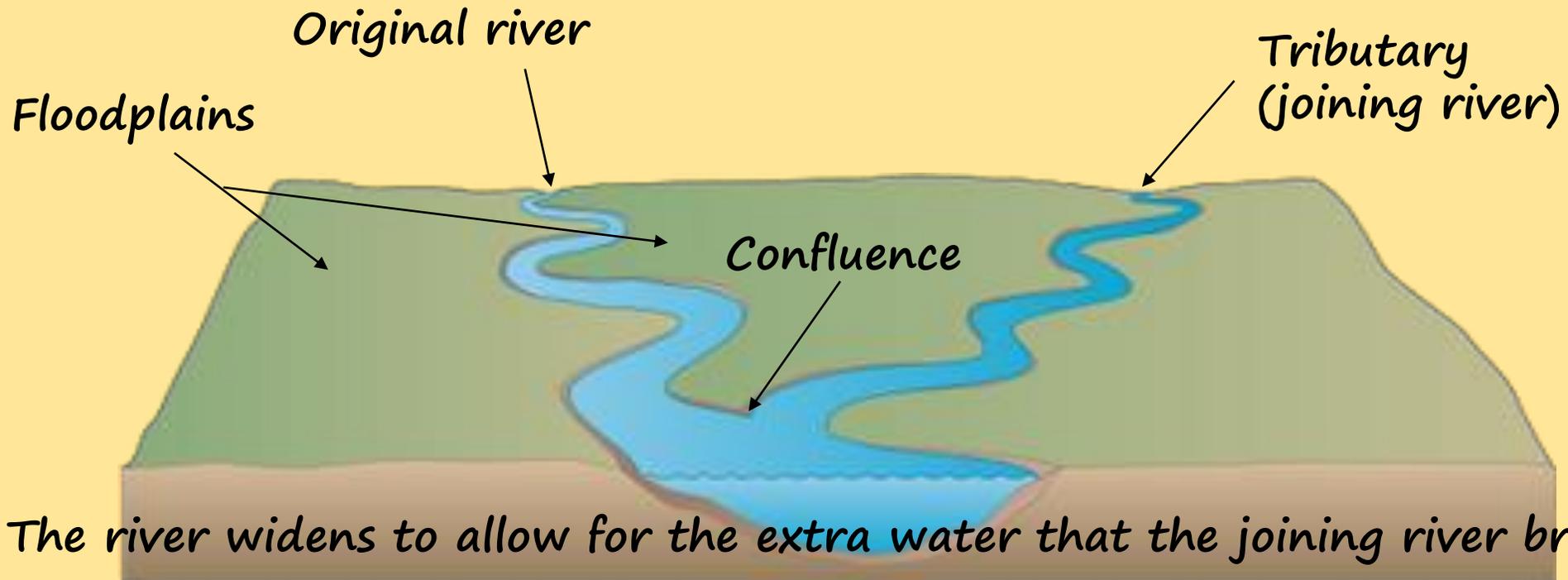
**RIVER  
SOURCE**

Groundwater

Springs go on  
to form  
streams

# The middle course

On either side of the middle course of the river are floodplains, these areas are flat and often become flooded when heavy rainfall causes the river to overflow. Sometimes, another river (a tributary) will join a river; the joining point is called a confluence.



The river widens to allow for the extra water that the joining river brings.

# The middle course - meanders

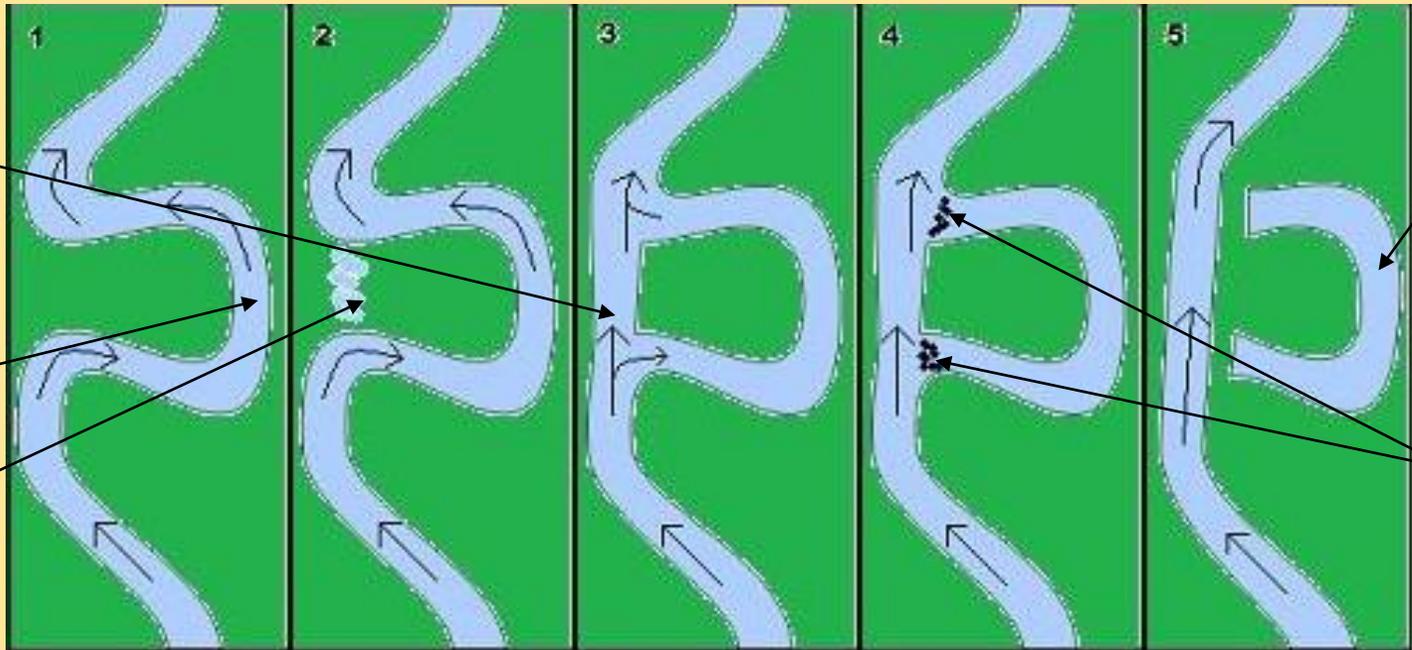
A meander is a large bend in a river. If a river floods, the neck of the meander becomes flooded and the river will take this route – rivers take the shortest route!

Over time, the neck of the meander will become the new path of the river, soil will be deposited by the river and the meander will be cut off completely and end up forming an ox bow lake.

River takes  
shortest  
route

Meander

Flood



Meander  
is cut off  
and ox  
bow lake  
forms

Soil  
deposited

# The lower course

The lower course of a river leads to the mouth of the river (where the river meets the sea). The lower course has larger meanders. The river has more energy and so carries less material. It deposits the soil and other materials which eventually form small islands or deltas.



# Key words

**Source** – the beginning of a river.

**Groundwater** – rain that soaks into the ground.

**Spring** – groundwater that comes up to the surface.

**Stream** – a small river.

**River** – a large natural stream of water.

**Floodplain** – area of flat land either side, likely to flood.

**Confluence** – the point where a tributary joins a river.

**Tributary** – a stream or river that joins another river.

**Meander** – a bend in a river.

**Ox bow lake** – a lake created when a meander is cut off.

**Mouth** – the place where a river meets the sea.

**Delta** – a small island created by deposited material (soil).