

Ryan's Well

By Jayne Keedle

Small steps can help solve the world's water crisis.

Kids really can make a difference. Just ask 15-year-old Ryan Hreljac (HURL-jak) of Kemptville, Canada. When he was 6, he learned about the shortage of safe drinking water in some parts of the world. Today, Ryan's Well Foundation has raised more than \$1.5 million to build more than 700 wells in 16 countries, most of them in Africa.

During his mission to raise money, Ryan became pen pals with Akana Jimmy, an orphan who lived in Africa. In Jimmy's tiny village of Agweo, Uganda, there was no clean water until Ryan raised enough money to buy the village its first well. A new book tells the story of their life-changing friendship—*Ryan and Jimmy and the Well in Africa That Brought Them Together*.

Two Different Worlds

Jimmy used to wake up before midnight and walk 3 miles to the nearest pond. There, he would fill a large plastic container with **contaminated**,¹ or polluted, water. Jimmy made that trip three times every day before heading to school. "Because you don't have any choice, you drink it," he told *WR News*.

In 1998, Ryan's first-grade teacher told the class that polluted water was causing thousands of children to become sick and even die. For Ryan, a lack of clean water was unimaginable. His teacher said the cost of building a well in Africa was just \$70. Determined to help, Ryan spent months doing household chores to earn enough money to pay for a well.

Later that year, Ryan proudly took his savings to WaterCan, a Canadian organization that helps provide safe drinking water to impoverished countries. To his disappointment, Ryan was told that the cost of building a well was much higher: \$2,000.

¹ **contaminated:** unable to be used because of the presence of something harmful

Ryan **vowed**, or promised, to continue raising money. Word of his mission spread, and soon the media picked up his story. To Ryan's astonishment, people started sending him donations. By 2000, Ryan, then 9, had raised enough money to build his first well. With help from Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief, Ryan chose Jimmy's village as the site for the well.

All's Well That Ends Well

Ryan's well changed the lives of the people in Agweo and especially affected Jimmy's life. That's when the two boys became pen pals. They became friends when Ryan traveled to Uganda in 2000 to help complete the well.

In 2003, Ryan's family arranged to bring Jimmy to their home in Canada. "We used to live as friends," Jimmy, now 17, says, "but now we live as brothers."

The two teenagers hope their book will raise awareness about unsafe drinking water and prompt people to take action to help. "The situation is difficult, but you have to start somewhere," Ryan says. "We need to work harder to make the world a better place."

Water Isn't Everywhere

More than two-thirds of Earth's surface is covered by water, so you might think there is enough to go around. You may be surprised to learn that water is scarce. Only a limited amount of water is drinkable. Salty seawater makes up about 97 percent of the world's water. Another 2 percent is frozen at the North and South Poles.

More than 1 billion people around the world don't have access to safe drinking water, according to the United Nations. Why isn't all the freshwater available to people safe for drinking? Chemicals from factories, **fertilizers**² from farms, and untreated **sewage**³ pollute the water supply. "One of our goals is to educate people about the importance of clean water," says Ryan.

² **fertilizers**: substances used to make soil more suitable for growing

³ **sewage**: human waste matter and water removed by a system of pipes and ditches

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How do Ryan and Jimmy know each other?

- A They are brothers.
- B They were pen pals.
- C They lived together as friends once.
- D They raised money together.

2. Which best describes how the author organizes the information in this passage?

- A The author compares and contrasts the lives of Akana Jimmy and Ryan Hreljac with facts and opinions.
- B The author describes the concept of water scarcity with factual evidence.
- C The author describes the problem of clean water scarcity and the steps one boy took to alleviate the problem.
- D The author provides evidence to persuade the reader about the importance of kids working to alleviate worldwide issues.

3. Read the sentences.

"Only a limited amount of water is drinkable. Salty seawater makes up about 97 percent of the world's water. Another 2 percent is frozen at the North and South Poles."

What can be concluded from these sentences?

- A Water frozen in the North and South Poles is not salt water.
- B Salt water is the largest source of drinkable water.
- C Salt water is not drinkable.
- D Salt water can freeze.

4. Read the sentence.

"The two teenagers hope their book will raise awareness about unsafe drinking water and **prompt** people to take action to help."

What is the meaning of **prompt** as used in this sentence?

- A prompt (*noun*): an encouragement
- B prompt (*adjective*): quick
- C prompt (*verb*): to irritate
- D prompt (*verb*): to encourage

5. What is the main idea of this passage?

- A Water scarcity is a major, worldwide problem, but something that even kids can help improve.
- B Differences between friends can be overcome when working on a communal project.
- C Travelling to another country can be both educational and helpful.
- D World leaders have come together to solve the clean drinking water shortage around the world.

6. Explain why the world's freshwater is not all safe for drinking using evidence from the text.

7. What can be concluded about Ryan's character based on this passage? Use text evidence to support your ideas.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Initially, Ryan and Jimmy were pen pals, while _____ they visited each other's countries and homes.

- A later on
- B although
- C beforehand
- D primarily

9. Read the following sentence.

"During his mission to raise money, Ryan became pen pals with Akana Jimmy, an orphan who lived in Africa."

Answer the following questions based on the information provided in the sentence you just read. One of the questions has already been answered for you.

Who is the main subject of the sentence? Ryan

What did Ryan do? _____

When? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** impoverished (*adjective*): poor, lacking resources.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____
