

## UNIT 4: THE HYDROSPHERE

### RYAN'S WELL

Dear language assistant,

In this class I would like the students to think about the lack of drinking water in many places in the world and to discover the Ryan Hreljac's story. Ryan is a very interesting boy and an example for our students. Besides they are the same generation. I have taken the information from these websites:

[http://rw3.ryanswell.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=21&Itemid=51](http://rw3.ryanswell.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=21&Itemid=51)  
<http://www.readersdigest.ca/mag/2001/01/ryan.html>

1. You can tell them his story using your own words and following a presentation as a guide. The text below contains the whole story but it's not necessary to know every detail, just a summary. I would like you to watch the presentation before the class.

<http://www.ieslosremedios.org/~pablo/webpablo/web1eso/4hydrosphere/Ryan%20Presentacion.ppt>

(Instead of the presentation the students can surf the net looking for information in the Ryan Foundation's web)

2. At the end you can ask some questions to see if they have understood the story. The questions are in the Activity Book (page 52) and in the presentation. I think you can discuss with the students the right answer for each question and then copy it on the board; they can do the same on their books. (Another way: they can answer the questions on their own and after some minutes you can check them all.) The answers to questions 6, 7 and 8 aren't in the text but in the website. Here you have the questions and the answers. Of course, you can change the sentences as you like.

- **Why is Ryan famous?** Because he was worried about people who haven't got drinking water and decided to get money in order to build a well. And he got it when he was a child.
- **What happens to people who haven't got drinking water?** Without access to clean water people become ill and sometimes even die.
- **How old was he when he began to get money? How old is he now?** He was six years old and now he's thirteen. He was born on 1992?
- **Where does Ryan live?** The Hreljacs live in a country home in North Grenville, just south of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
- **How did Ryan earn the money to build his first well?** He got 70 dollars in four months. He did extra chores to earn the money.
- **How many wells has the Ryan Foundation built to date? (266) How many people have got drinking water? (35,043 people and 12 countries) How much money have they collected? (More than a million dollar)**
- **Which sports does Ryan practise?** Soccer, basketball, hockey and swimming. (He also likes reading and playing Nintendo).
- **Which job does Ryan like when he grows up?** He plans to be a water engineer

- **Who is Jimmy? Where is he from?** Jimmy Akana is his African pen pal. Jimmy is now Ryan's brother, living with the Hreljac's in Kemptville, ON. (In addition, Ryan has two brothers: Jordan and Keegan. His older brother Jordan sets up most of Ryan's audiovisual presentations and assists in the creation of the RWF newsletters. His younger brother Keegan has licked hundreds of stamps for thank you letters and notes that have been sent around the world; Keegan now takes many of the RWF photographs.)

Thank you

## Ryan's Well

BY KATHY COOK

On learning that African children were dying for lack of clean water, the young Canadian decided to act

From Canadian Reader's Digest January 2001

SIX-YEAR-OLD Ryan Hreljac sat in shock **as he listened to his Grade 1 teacher**, Nancy Prest, at Holy Cross Catholic School in Kemptville, Ont. Launching a school-wide campaign, she spoke that day of the sad plight of children living in impoverished, disease-stricken Africa, where there was little access to medicine, food or clean water. Ryan, a sensitive child with blond hair and blue eyes, winced when he heard that hundreds of thousands of African children die each year just from drinking contaminated water.

IT WAS January 1998, and Holy Cross was raising money for African relief. "Every penny helps," Prest told her class. She explained that a single penny would buy a pencil; 25 cents, 175 vitamins; 60 cents, a two-month supply of medicine for one child; "and \$70 pays for a well."

WHEN RYAN'S mother, Susan, 40, a consultant at the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, and Mark, his police-officer father, got home later that day, Ryan rushed past his baby-sitter to greet them. "**Mom, Dad, I need \$70 for a well in Africa!**" he said excitedly.

"That's nice, Ryan," his mother replied distractedly as his younger brother, Keegan, three, clung to her.

Over dinner, Ryan tried again.

"Ryan, \$70 is a lot of money," his mother said. "We can't afford that."

The next evening Ryan brought the subject up again. "You don't understand," he said, tears filling his eyes. "**Children are dying because they don't have clean water!**"

Susan exchanged a glance with Mark and sat Ryan down. "If you're really serious about raising \$70, **you can do extra chores around the house,**" she said, assuming he would quickly forget his project.

Ryan's face lit up. To encourage him, Susan drew a red thermometer on a piece of paper with 35 lines across it, each line representing \$2. For every \$2, Ryan could fill in a line and put his earnings into an old cookie tin. "But Ryan," Susan said, "you'll have to do *extra* chores, not just the ones you already do."

"Okay," he said.

**His first job was to vacuum the house.** While Keegan and Ryan's older brother, Jordan, played outside, Ryan cleaned for two hours. He got \$2. A few days later, instead of watching a movie with the family, **he washed windows.** Another \$2.

Hearing about his goal, Ryan's grandfather hired the three brothers to pick up pinecones for craft projects, earning \$10 for each garbage bag they filled. When Ryan brought his spring report card home, his parents gave him a \$5 reward for good grades. That, too, went into the tin.

By Easter, when the school's fund-raising campaign ended, Ryan's class had raised nearly \$30 in pennies.

"I'm still collecting for the well," Ryan told his teacher. Chore by chore, loonie by loonie, he had by now amassed \$35.

AS SUSAN left for work one morning, she glanced at the thermometer on the fridge. It was two thirds full. *Who do you give \$70 to to build a well in Africa?* she wondered. She called the school, but they didn't know. Then Brenda Cameron Couch, a friend who worked at an international development organization, **told her of WaterCan, a small nonprofit agency in Ottawa that funds and monitors well building** in developing countries.

Couch called WaterCan and told them about Ryan. "Seventy dollars might not be a lot, but this kid has worked hard for it," she said. "I'd like him to give you his money in person."

On the day of the meeting in late April, Ryan, wearing a tie and dress pants, nervously **handed his cookie tin to Nicole Bosley, WaterCan's then-executive director**. "There's an extra \$5 here," he said, lowering his voice. "You might want to buy some hot lunches for the people making the well."

"Thank you, Ryan," Bosley said, smiling. She began telling him about WaterCan's clean-water projects, explaining that **while \$70 would buy a hand pump, it actually cost closer to \$2,000 to drill a well**. Too young to appreciate such a large sum, Ryan replied, **"I'll just do more chores, then."**

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) matches WaterCan's funds two for one, so Ryan would have to find almost \$700 to build his well. That night Susan and Mark sat in bed discussing what to do. "He's come so far," Mark said. "We can't just tell him, 'Ryan, you tried, but you can't really make a difference.'" Yet how could a six-year-old raise \$700 just by doing chores?

The following week Couch sent out an e-mail to family and friends telling them about Ryan's project. The next day her accountant cousin, Blaine Cameron, e-mailed back. Touched by Ryan's actions, he wanted to send in a donation matching Ryan's. Others told Couch the story was so moving that she should try to publish it. A few months later, the *Kemptville Advance* -- circulation 5,500 -- ran the story, calling it "Making a Difference: Ryan's Well."

Summer came and Ryan, now seven, turned his attention from school to fun. Yet throughout the holidays he kept doing extra chores. Periodically, Susan forwarded his donations to WaterCan.

In early August Susan bumped into Derek Puddicombe, an old acquaintance and freelance journalist. When Susan told him about Ryan's efforts, Puddicombe's interest was tweaked. "What a fantastic story! I bet the *Citizen* would buy it."

Puddicombe interviewed Ryan and *The Ottawa Citizen* sent a photographer to take pictures. Every morning Ryan expectantly looked through the newspaper, but weeks passed and the story didn't show up. "Maybe they lost it," he said, disappointment on his face.

MEANWHILE, WaterCan called to say that donations for Ryan's Well had passed \$700. He and Susan were invited to a September board meeting to hear Gizaw Shibrú, director for Uganda at Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief (CPAR). WaterCan funded well construction by giving money to CPAR-Uganda, which then partnered with local villagers and actually dug and maintained the wells.

**When Shibrú arrived, he gave Ryan a warm hug. "I understand you got us a well," he said. "Thank you."**

Shibrú had a list of locations in need of a well. With only 46 percent of Ugandans having access to safe water, the list was long. **Ryan asked Shibrú if his well could be near a school**. Shibrú scanned his notes and told Ryan that it could be built next to Angolo Primary School in Otwal subcounty of Northern Uganda.

Angolo Primary was in an area suffering from 13 years of rebel activity, several years of drought and the scourge of AIDS. The closest water source was a swamp five kilometres away. Many of the children had large, extended bellies from infestations of intestinal worms. At any given time, nearly a quarter of the students had diarrhea. Typhoid and other deadly water-borne diseases were also common. With no doctors in the area of 31,850 people, one in five children died before age five.

Ryan listened intently as Shibru explained the slow process of building a well with a hand auger -- a task requiring 20 people working for ten days or more. "Drilling equipment would allow us to make many more wells," he said. He already knew the type he wanted--a small drill that could be transported in the back of a truck. It would cost \$25,000.

"I'll raise the money for that drill," Ryan said quietly. "I want everyone in Africa to have clean water."

Back home, Susan told Mark, "We're raising money for a \$25,000 well drill now." Mark's face dropped. He believed they were setting Ryan up for failure.

SUSAN wrote to one of the *Citizen's* editors, telling him about Ryan's meeting with WaterCan and asking when Puddicombe's article would be published. The editor called her back. "It'll be in tomorrow's paper."

**When it appeared next day, an Ottawa TV station called, wanting to interview Ryan. Newspapers across Canada reprinted the story.**

A week later a letter arrived in the Hreljacs' mailbox, addressed "Ryan's Well, Kemptville, Ontario." Inside was a cheque for \$25 and a note saying, "I wish I could do more."

Shortly after, another cheque came in, this time addressed to Ryan's Well, Holy Cross School. It was for \$20. After seeing Ryan's story on television, a group of eastern Ontario well drillers gave Ryan \$2,700 for his cause.

Within two months, **the little boy had inspired \$7,000 in donations.**

By now Ryan's Grade 2 friends were clamouring to help. Their teacher, Lynn Dillabaugh, had never seen a child inspire others so much. *I've got to foster this*, she thought.

Dillabaugh informed parents that the class wished to raise money for another well and placed a watering can in the classroom for her students to drop coins in. She also asked WaterCan to help her start a pen-pal relationship with Angolo Primary. CPAR-Uganda offered to deliver the letters and pick up the Ugandan children's replies.

The first batch of letters went off in January 1999. **Two months later a package from Angolo arrived with letters addressed to each student.** Ryan was handed his, the large print filling the page:

*Dear Ryan, my name is Akana Jimmy. I am 8 years old. I like soccer. Our house is made of grass. How is America? Your friend, Akana Jimmy.*

With the letter was a photograph of Jimmy taken by CPAR. For weeks Ryan raved about his new pen pal. Could he meet him? he asked. Susan and Mark thought they might be able to afford a trip one day. Perhaps when Ryan was 12.

Ryan wrote back:

*Dear Jimmy, It must be cool to have a house made out of grass. I am 8 now. Do you drink from my well every day? What is your favourite subject in school? I am going to Uganda when I am 12. My house is made out of bricks. Write back soon. Your friend, Ryan.*

Backed now by the entire school, Ryan continued fund-raising. He spent hours hand-printing letters, asking organizations for money for his drill. When donations came in, he wrote thank-you notes. By November he had garnered enough for CPAR-Uganda to buy the new machinery.

SHORTLY before Christmas Bruce Paynter, the Hreljacs' neighbour, asked his wife what she wanted as a present. "I don't really need anything," Bev Paynter replied. **"But I'd love for Ryan to be able to go see his well."**

Soon after, Bruce, a frequent air traveller, presented Ryan and his parents with air miles to help get them to Uganda, and when *The Ottawa Citizen* published a request for more air-mile donations, the community quickly responded. WaterCan also donated to the family's airfare and other travel expenses.

ON THE HOT morning of July 27, 2000, a truck bearing Shibru, Ryan and his parents bumped its way down a Ugandan dirt road. As it neared Angolo, four tiny children spotted them and began jumping up and down excitedly. **"Ryan! Ryan! Ryan!" they called.**

"They know my name!" Ryan cried in surprise.

"Everybody for a hundred kilometres knows your name, Ryan," Shibu said.

Around a bend, a line of some 5,000 children from nearby schools stood waiting along the roadside. As the truck approached, they began clapping in a rhythmic beat.

"Let's get out," Shibu said. His head down, Ryan walked by the clapping children, waving bashfully. A band formed before them and, to music, led the procession to Angolo Primary School.

There, village elders greeted Ryan solemnly and took him to his well beside the school's vegetable garden. Adorned with flowers, the well had a message etched in the concrete base:

*Ryan's Well:*

*Formed by Ryan Hreljac  
For Community of Angolo  
Primary School*

**Akana Jimmy, a tall, thin boy, much like Ryan, stood waiting by the well for his pen pal.**

"Hello," Jimmy said shyly.

"Hi, Jimmy," Ryan replied. They stood together awkwardly, uncomfortable with the attention on them, then Jimmy grabbed Ryan's hand and led him to the well so that he could cut the ribbon. Later, with Ryan's parents, they walked to some chairs set up in a field.

An elder stood up. "Look around at our children," he said. "You can see they're healthy. This is because of Ryan and our friends in Canada. For us, water is life."

A high-pitched wail came from the crowd. The headmaster, holding a small goat, stepped out and placed the squealing animal next to Ryan. "A gift of appreciation from Angolo," he said, bowing. Ryan cupped his hands over his mouth in delight, while Susan and Mark were presented with gifts of wood carvings and pottery.

Two dozen boys erupted from the crowd and, in a circle, began performing a traditional hunting dance to the sound of drums. Ryan laughed excitedly as Jimmy took his hand and led him outside the circle. Then Jimmy jumped in, and as Ryan followed, everyone cheered.

After four hours of dancing and celebration, Susan got up to speak. "I just want to say," she said, tears in her eyes, "that this has been the happiest day of my life. It will live in my heart forever."

That night, noticing Ryan was very quiet, Susan asked how he was feeling. "I feel wonderful, Mom," he said. Susan gave her son a hug, and together they began to recite their bedtime ritual: "Star light, star bright, the first star I see tonight...." And then Ryan rounded off that unforgettable day with his nightly prayer: "I wish for everyone in Africa to have clean water."

Since Angolo Primary School and the community began using Ryan's well for their cooking and drinking water, the rates of diarrheal infections and water-borne disease have dropped. **Ryan's fund-raising continues.** At last count he had helped raise over \$60,000 for new drilling and well-construction equipment in Uganda. With CIDA's contributions, the funds have built more than 30 wells.