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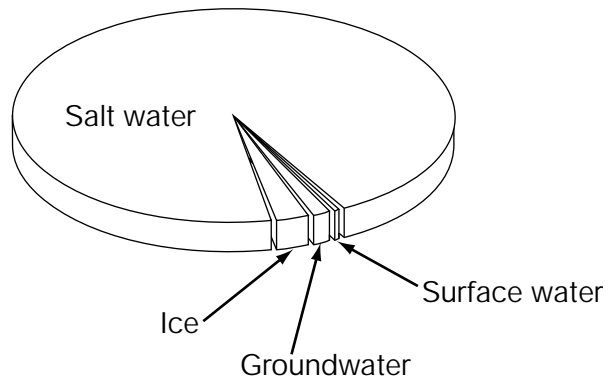
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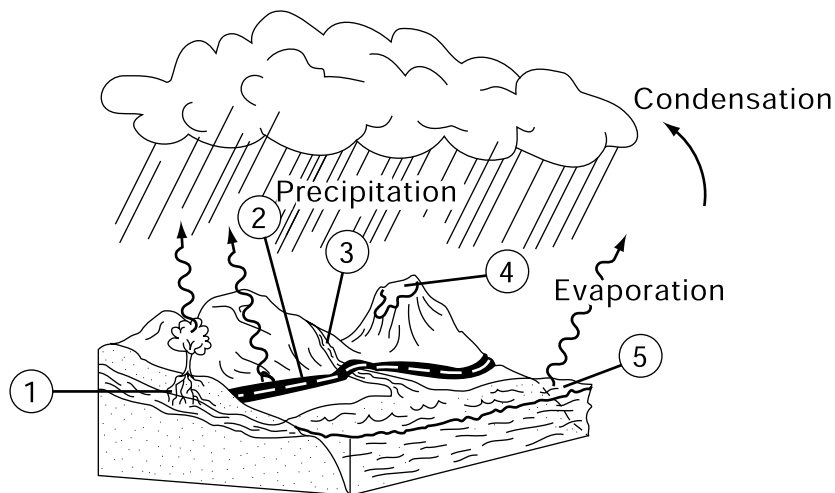
The Water Cycle

Water covers most of Earth's surface. However, 97% of it is **salt water** found in the oceans. **Fresh water** makes up the remaining 3% of Earth's waters. Plants, animals, and people need fresh water to live. However, most of the fresh water, or 2% of all water, is trapped. It is frozen in glaciers and polar ice. Only 1% of the water is fresh water that living things can use.



Journey of a Raindrop

Fresh water can be found in the air as water vapor. It can be found underground as groundwater. **Groundwater** is water underground that flows slowly toward the lowest level. Fresh water flows on the surface in streams, rivers, and lakes. The movement of water from the air to the ground and back again is known as the **water cycle**. You learned something about the water cycle earlier in this course. Now, use the numbers in the diagram to follow the journey of a single drop of rain after it falls to the ground.



The Water Cycle

Aquifers

Groundwater flows slowly through underground aquifers. **Aquifers** [ACK wiff urs] are layers of rock that carry water underground. Sedimentary rock layers of sandstone or limestone are porous and make good aquifers. A solid rock with many cracks can also make a good aquifer.

Gravity pulls groundwater downhill through an aquifer. The groundwater will flow fastest on a steep and porous aquifer. In some places, though, groundwater flows at a rate of only 1 inch per day. It can remain underground for thousands of years.

Aquifers are an important source of water for about half the country. Wells are dug down to the aquifer. People living in the country have their own wells to supply water to their houses. Some communities will pump groundwater into large above-ground tanks. Gravity feeds the water into individual homes. Often, the water is filtered and treated before it enters your home.



Do you know where your water comes from? Does it come from your own well or a community water supply? Some communities get their water from lakes and reservoirs. Sometimes water runs through miles of pipes to reach your home. Find out how water comes to your home.

ANSWER: Answers will vary.

Artesian Formations

In some places, aquifers run between two layers of hard rock: **cap rock** above and **bedrock** below. Rainwater cannot pass through the cap rock. The groundwater cannot seep down through the bedrock. The aquifer is filled by rainwater entering uphill. The water then flows downhill through the aquifer. This arrangement of rock is called an **artesian formation**.