

## Testing the Waters

*Testing the Waters* is a public exhibition, a curriculum, and an online resource comprised of stories, images, maps, and video that share “stories of place” focused on water across the Colorado River Basin.

In collaboration with local teachers, researchers, environmental scientists, artists, and writers, high school students were challenged to find ways to bring the dry facts of the river system to life through words and images.

The project builds on a successful EPA funded STEM curriculum, started in 2016, called *SCAPE* (Sustainable Communities and Place-based Education). School of Art professor Dan Collins, the project director, has worked with science teachers in 15 high schools to introduce water quality testing protocols, environmental history, and sustainable practices across six western states. The project seeks to reveal the intimate relationship between the physical, chemical, and biological evidence of the natural world and the personal, community-based, and cultural perspectives of humans from diverse geographic and social circumstances.

For this iteration of the project, students from four schools across Arizona—Douglas High School, PPEP Tec High School near Yuma, Coconino High School in Flagstaff, and Maryvale High School in west Phoenix—were encouraged to develop creative responses and stories that addressed the many challenges of “Water in the West.”

Students from Douglas High School, hard on our southern border with Mexico, worked on a variety of projects that culminated in the photo essay and documentary video entitled *Black Waters*. This is not just a compelling literary trope; the title also references the English translation of Douglas’s sister city immediately to the South—Agua Prieta—which shares a history, culture, and underground aquifer and water supply with Douglas. High School teacher Camilla Atree was assisted by media artist, Jenea Sanchez (MFA, Intermedia, 2009), in guiding the students.

PPEP Tec High School in Somerton was established by educational visionary, Dr. John Arnold, in 1967. One of six charter school campuses across southern Arizona, the PPEP campus in Somerton (just south of Yuma) “remains dedicated to carrying out the dreams of its first Bracero migrant farm workers students for a better way of life.” This year, students of PPEP history and

social studies teacher, Javier Fonseca-Garcia, created a delightful stop-action video that tells the story of the multiplicity of uses of water in the Yuma area—from recreation to agriculture.

Coconino High School students, working with environmental science teacher David Krassner and Arizona artist Shawn Skabelund, created a 30 foot long assemblage of saw-cut pine planks, photographs, and water testing data. *Ancient Waters* was inspired by the students' field experience at Fossil Creek in April 2019. The AP Environmental science class took their first science-based field trip to Fossil Creek in 2000, an activity that has since turned into a long term ecological study and field trip class tradition. Gathering data on water quality, native fish and macroinvertebrate populations, students have documented the changes in the creek by taking photographs and recording data at specific locations over the past 19 years. The idea for the *Ancient Waters* model of Fossil Creek was generated from meetings between Shawn and the students. Shawn accompanied the class on the field trip to Fossil Creek, where he was able to interact with students on site and brainstorm ways to give expression to this unique desert oasis. Following the field trip, Shawn and a smaller group of students created the installation in his studio.

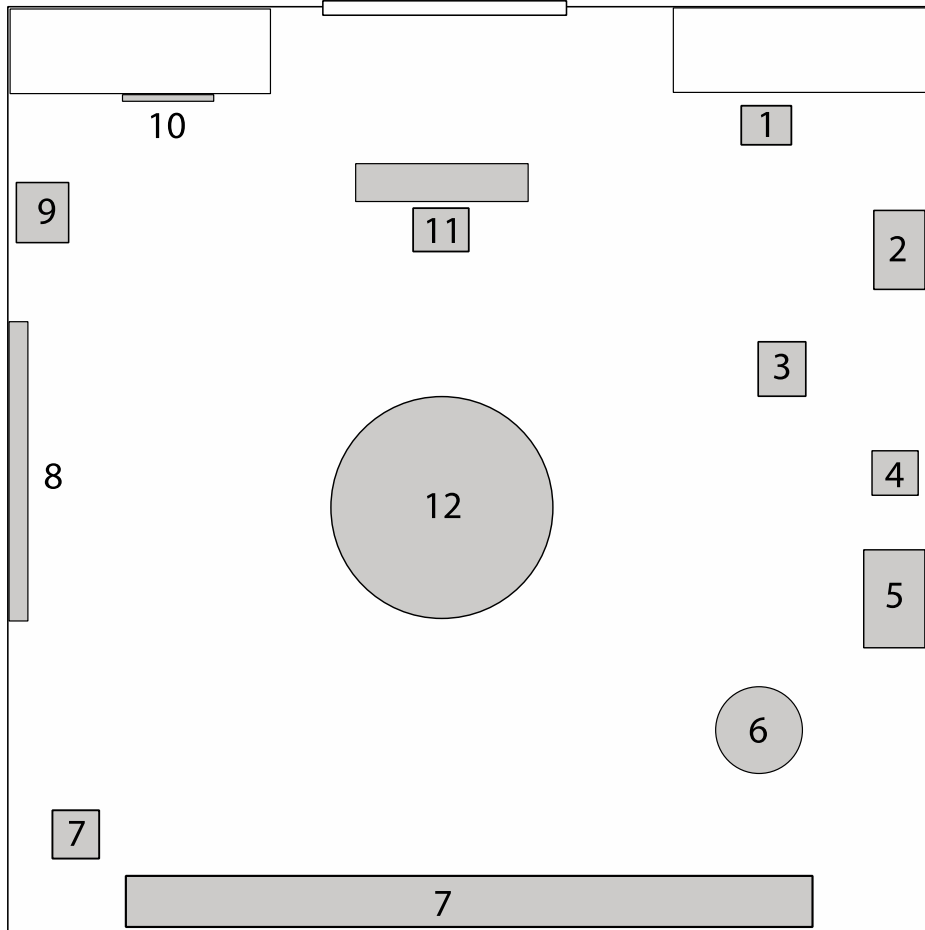
Finally, a wonderful collaboration at Maryvale High School in West Phoenix between History teacher Anne Marie Shanahan, English teacher Jeff Chmielewski, and Gifted and Talented Academy director, Dr. Renu Singh led to a combination of formal essays about the history of water in the West and an animated stop-motion fantasy that alludes to the potential violence that might result from contaminated water supplies. The students were ably assisted by Kimberly Lyle (MFA Intermedia, 2018) and Justin Rodier (current MFA candidate in Intermedia).

We would like to thank the teachers, artists, and students who participated and contributed their creative efforts to this year long project. In addition, *Testing the Waters* in all of its manifestations would not have been possible without the generous support of Arizona Humanities, the School of Art, the Herberger Institute of Design and the Arts Dean's office, the Global Institute of Sustainability, and the Telluride Institute.

The project is ongoing and we would love your ideas and creative contributions. For further information about *SCAPE* and the *Testing the Waters* project, visit the following: <http://coloradoriverscape.org> or contact Professor Dan Collins at [dan.collins@asu.edu](mailto:dan.collins@asu.edu)

## Testing the Waters

A Collaboration between Four Arizona High Schools and Arizona Artists focused on Water  
October 28 – November 1, 2019  
Harry Wood Art Gallery, School of Art, Arizona State University



1. *Testing the Waters* curriculum
2. Animation station and lesson plans
3. Water testing equipment
4. Student history essays from Maryvale High School
5. Student animations from Maryvale High School and PPEP Tec High School
6. *Secchi Disk*. Sculpture by artist Laurie Lundquist
7. *Ancient Waters*. Wall installation by Coconino HS students and artist Shawn Skabelund
8. *Black Waters*. Photo/audio installation by Ismael Vega & Maria C. Terry, Douglas High School
9. *Documentary Video*. Video by Tino Val Montano, Douglas High School
10. Vintage map of Arizona with demographics and environmental information
11. *Watershed*. Sculpture by Dan Collins
12. *Endangered*. Installation by Laurie Lundquist and Dan Collins