

Proposal for Emoji: RIVER

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1. Identification

- a. **CLDR Short name:** RIVER
- b. **CLDR keywords** stream, brook, rivulet, fording, crossing, wading, river-rafting, whitewater, current, flow, Nile, Amazon, Yellow, Yangtze, Mississippi

2. Images



Credit: Anna Zeng. Free for use in conjunction with this proposal.

3. **Sort Order:** In the PLACE-GEOGRAPHIC category, after MOUNT FUJI

4. **Reference Emoji:** ELEPHANT

Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of the RIVER emoji to the Unicode Library. Doubtlessly *the* most important geographical feature on Earth to human history, RIVERS have been dubbed “cradles of civilization,” as the earliest permanent human settlements were invariably found next to them. RIVERS are found on every continent except Antarctica, and have also played a role in literally shaping the Earth through erosion and canyon creation. In a metaphoric sense, RIVERS are related to flowing, changing, freedom, and “streams” of thought. The RIVER is one of the most important features on this planet, and as such deserves a unique emoji!

Introduction

“The country is in ruins, and there are still mountains and rivers.”--Japanese Proverb¹

The “cradle of civilization,” which turned humanity from a group of hominids into a civilization...the ever-flowing reminder of time and thought...the *river*. These massive bodies of moving water, found on every continent save Antarctica and in every people’s history, are among the most important natural features not just to humans, but to their own ecosystems and surrounding areas. Rivers have literally shaped the world, and also figuratively shaped its history by changing the lives of everything around them. The ubiquity of rivers explains their constant presence in mythology, religion, literature, and art in every culture, and speaks to their long history. And yet for all their importance, the river thinks nothing of it, and simply does as it has always done--as is said in *Show Boat*, “Ol’ Man River, he just keeps rollin’ along.”²

On the surface, a river has a rather simple definition--“a natural flowing watercourse, usually freshwater, flowing towards an ocean, sea, lake, or another river.”³ This definition fits many words--“stream, creek, brook, rivulet, and rill”--but all are synonyms for river; the largest distinction seems to be the size of the body.⁴ In general, rivers begin at a source, or *headwater*, where water in general collects (either through precipitation or runoff from other sources, such as melting mountain snow) and then begins its long trek to the sea or ocean.⁵ From the headwater, the river runs along its course--shaped over millions of years, and lasting anywhere from a few feet to thousands of miles or kilometers--and eventually ends in the *delta*, or *rivermouth*, where it meets the larger body of water connected to it.⁶ Many rivers are tied to the natural cycles of the world: a “rainy season,” for example, causes a river to overflow and become simultaneously more dangerous (to cross and navigate) and more life-giving (sediment and silt wash up along the banks, creating fertile soil).

Given the ageless nature of rivers, it is perhaps unsurprising that they have played a major role in the very shaping of the Earth itself. Over the course of millions of years, rivers run along the ground and, in some cases, *through* it, creating canyons, basins, and natural landmarks. The Grand Canyon, for example--the world’s deepest--was shaped over millennia by the Colorado River.⁷

¹ <http://www.listofproverbs.com/keywords/river/>

² “Ol’ Man River,” *Show Boat*, Jerome Kern.

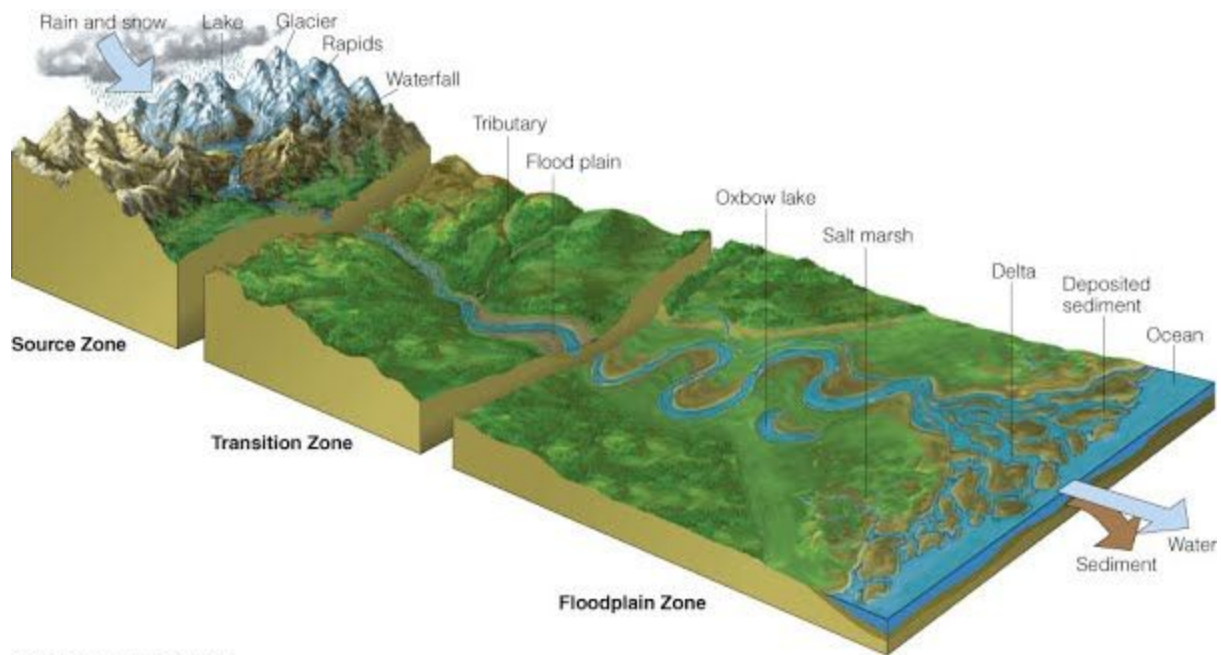
³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_source

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_delta

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Canyon



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A generic map of a river biome--it begins at the headwater, or source zone, moves along its course, and ends in the ocean or sea.⁸

The size and depth of rivers also make them breeding grounds--sometimes literally--for all manner of life. As every river is different, it is impossible to make generalizations about the life found within them, but some similar conclusions can be drawn. Rivers are home to many unique types of fish--the *American salmon*, for example, famously swims upriver to return to its spawning grounds each year to continue its life cycle, while the *piranha*, of the Amazon River of South America, is infamous for its carnivorous diet. Other rivers, including the Nile, contain more dangerous creatures: the mighty crocodile, for example, or the plodding but deadly hippopotamus.

The descriptions provided above give way to another, more human-centric factor of rivers--their role in civilization. Anthropologists, historians, and archaeologists all agree that the world's oldest "proper" civilizations--that is, permanent settlements where early humans moved away from hunter-gatherer subsistence living and toward agriculture and surplus food leading to the creation of other pursuits, such as art--were all formed in river basins. The world's oldest peoples were formed alongside four particular river sets: the Egyptian Nile, the Mesopotamian Tigris and Euphrates, the Indian Indus and Ganges, and the Shang-Chinese Yellow.⁹ These civilizations gave us the first of all forms of law, architecture, visual art, religions, masonry, artisanship, written language, oral history, and literature (in the form of epic poetry), and scholars believe that without rivers to provide a steady, reliable source of food (flooding cycles, which are periodic, allowed farmers to plan when to grow what crops), these developments

⁸ <https://sites.google.com/site/riversandstreamsbiome/>

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_valley_civilization

would not have been possible. No geographic feature, then, was more important for human development than the river.



A map of the four “big” African-Asian civilizations founded alongside rivers--Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Indian, and Chinese. These civilizations are the oldest in the world.¹⁰

Given the central nature of rivers, then, it is unsurprising to see that they play a massive role in the very forms of culture they helped create. Nations around the world have river-related deities; for example, Mami Wata is a powerful river goddess among West, Central, and Southern

¹⁰ <https://www.tes.com/lessons/m5GmsJjvUwBsAw/ancient-river-valley-civilizations>

African peoples¹¹, while Chinese myths tell that the four major rivers of that nation--the Yellow, Long, Black, and Pearl--are actually the transformed bodies of dragons, who gave up their physical forms to bring lifegiving water to humanity.¹² Several religions tell of rivers in major stories: the Underworld was separated from the realm of the living by the River Styx in Grecian belief, while Jesus Christ himself is baptized in the Jordan River as part of his mission on Earth. Rivers, with their constant, steady presence, are also symbols of hope and freedom; during African-American slavery, for example, coded Negro spirituals such as “Wade in the Water” told escaping slaves to both follow the Mississippi River and use its natural flow to shake off pursuing dogs.¹³



The Four Dragons (Black, Long, Yellow, and Pearl, clockwise from upper left) said to form the basis of the great rivers of China.¹⁴

An Igbo sculpture of Mami Wata, powerful river goddess. Note the snake wrapped around her body, signifying the serpents found in rivers.¹⁵



¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mami_Wata

¹² <https://wyrmlight.wordpress.com/2012/03/22/the-four-dragons-a-chinese-folk-story/>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wade_in_the_Water

¹⁴

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwipjqX0jc7iAhWiY98KHUztCCQQjxx6BAGBEAI&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.4dragonsltd.com%2Fdragon-boat-history%2Fthe-legend-of-the-four-dragons%2F&psig=AOvVaw1H939kPOGF2QkViEwf1Txw&ust=1559678650653238>

¹⁵

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/50/Mami_Wata_Figure_MIA.jpg/220px-Mami_Wata_Figure_MIA.jpg

There are countless other possible stories, myths, and uses of the term river to add--rivers, for example, are one of the most important sources of renewable energy via hydroelectric power; in contemporary society, *streaming* services such as Netflix have become ubiquitous, and are named for their "direct flow," just like actual streams--but to capture them all is impossible. All that can be said, then, is that rivers are one of, if not *the*, most important factors in human civilization and development--we, and the entire world, would not be where we are today without them.

Selection Factors – Inclusion

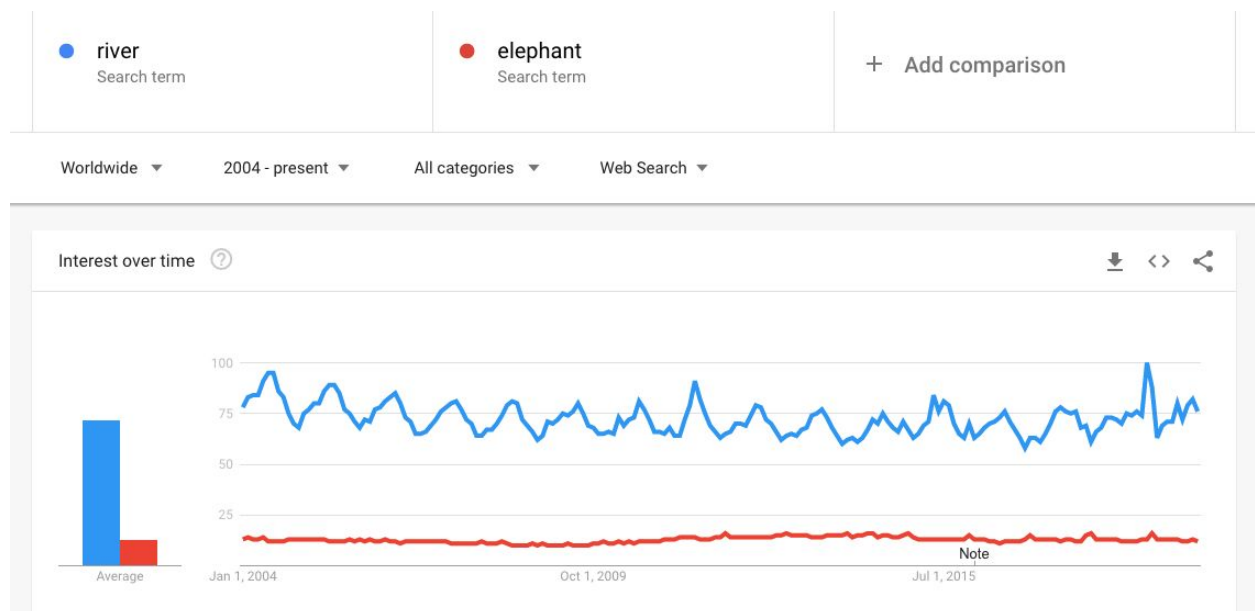
Compatibility

Not applicable.

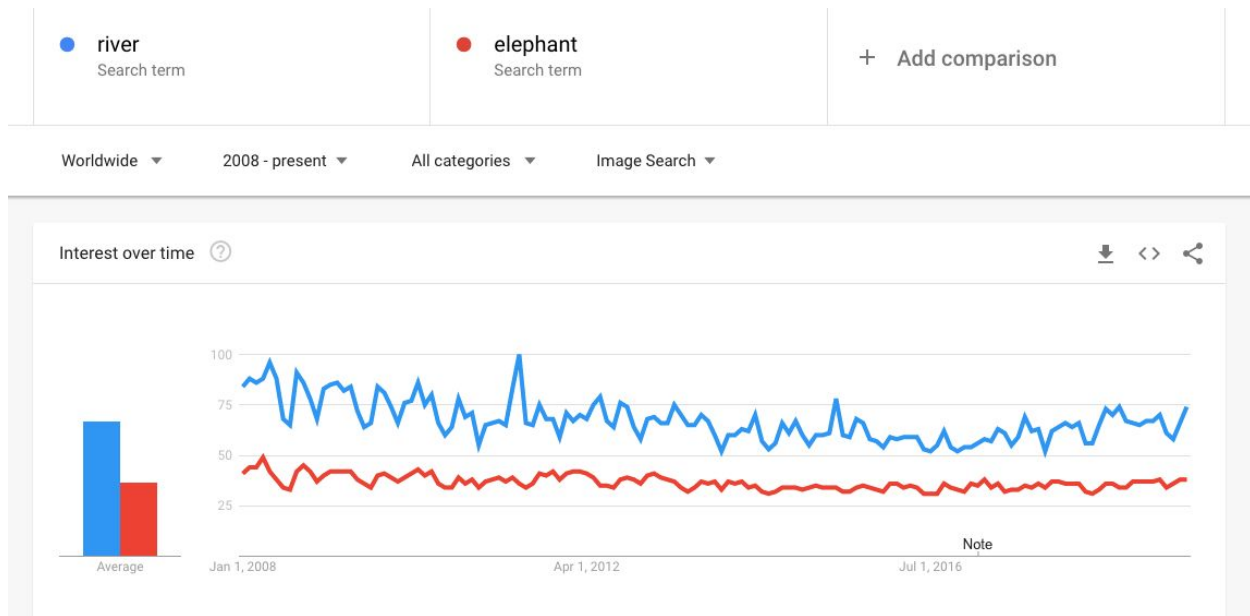
Expected Usage Level

Frequency

Google Trends: Web Search



Google Trends: Image Search

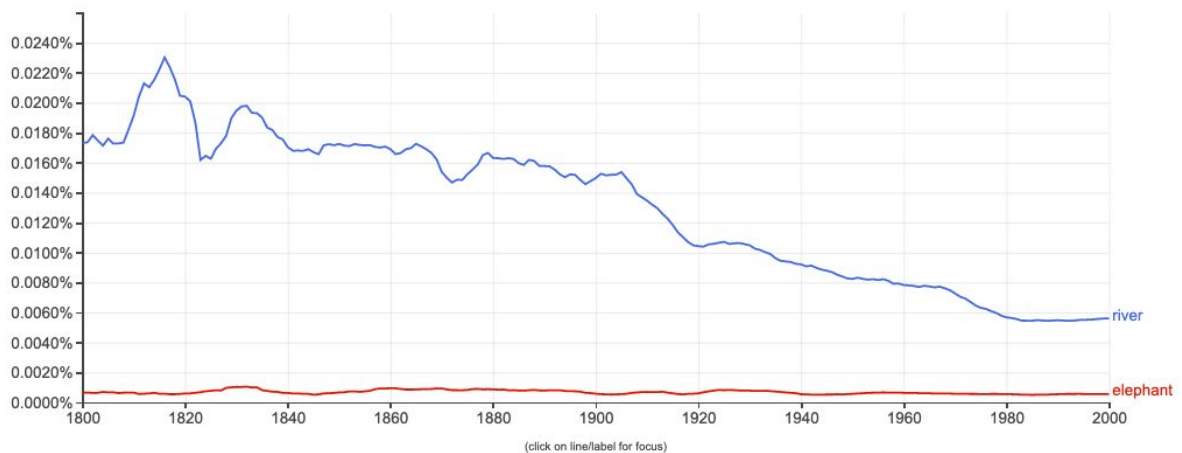


NGram Viewer

RIVER is the clear winner in written texts, appearing with near triple frequency to ELEPHANT throughout the entire nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Though RIVER does dip as time passes, it still remains a much more popular term.

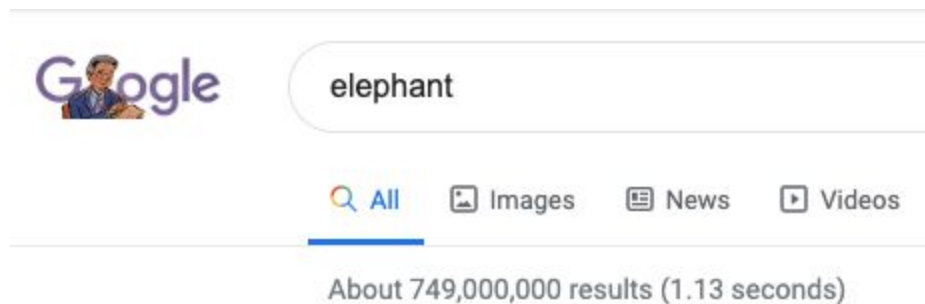
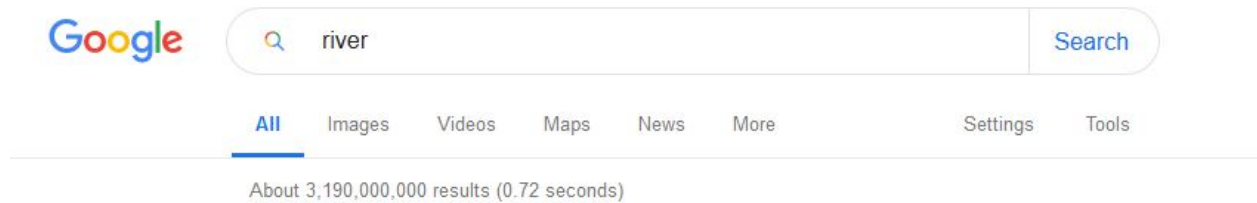
Google Books Ngram Viewer

Graph these comma-separated phrases: ☐ case-insensitive
 between and from the corpus with smoothing of [Search lots of books](#)

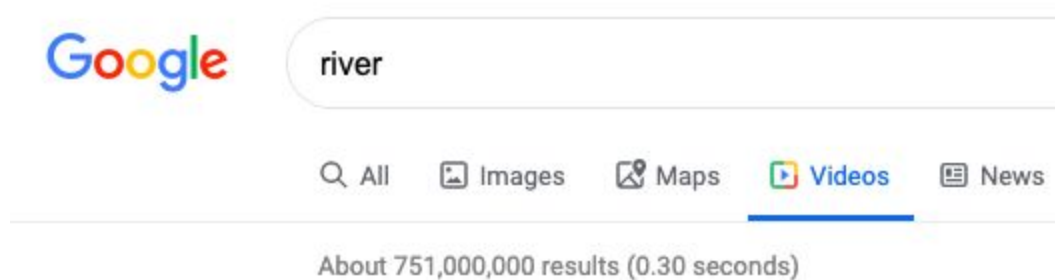


Google Search

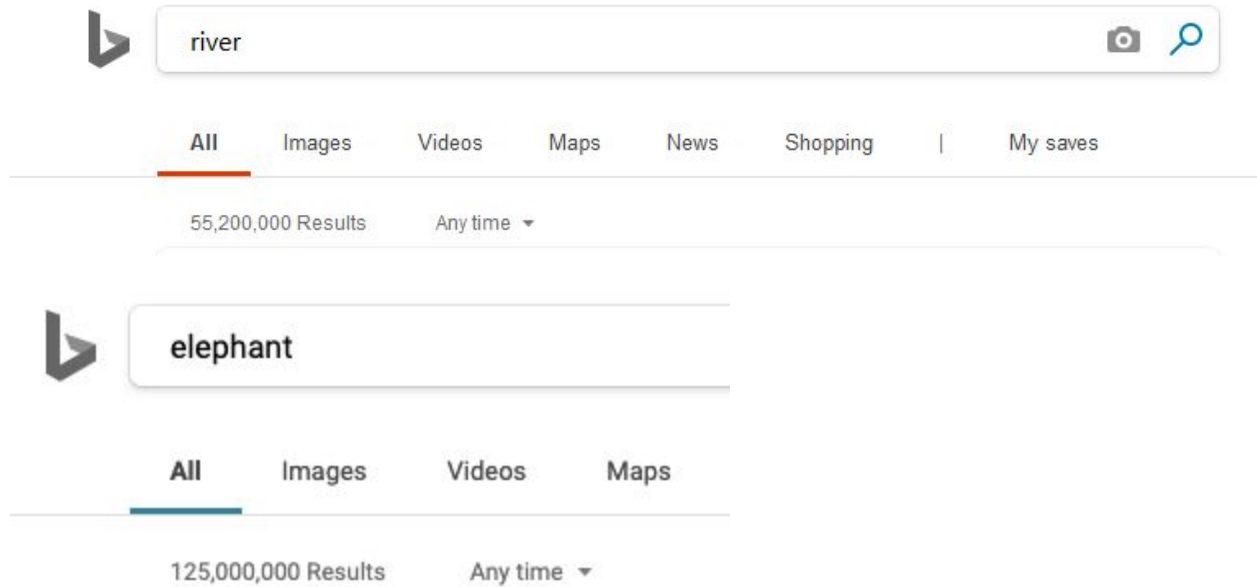
As with NGram, RIVER is searched nearly three times as often as ELEPHANT. With over *three billion* searches, RIVERS are clearly on the minds of everyone in the world!



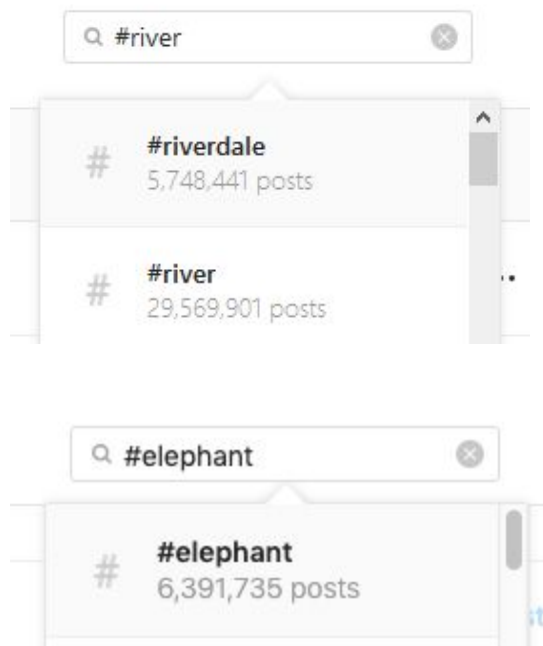
Google Video Search



Bing Search



Instagram Search



Multiple Usages

RIVERS have been closely linked to human history for millennia—to the point where anthropologists argue that civilization only truly began when peoples settled next to RIVERS throughout the world. Individual cultures will be able to use the RIVER emoji to denote national pride--the United States's Mississippi, China's Yangtze, Egypt's Nile, and Brazil's Amazon, for example. Those who study potamology (the scientific study of RIVERS) will be able to use this emoji, along with biologists, ecologists, and marine biologists. Other, more "casual" users may include anglers, rafters/sailors, explorers, and even people vacationing. Given that a RIVER can be found in nearly every country on Earth, true global usage is possible! In a metaphorical sense, a RIVER can also refer to "going with the flow" or "staying current," as both terms are used to describe their movement.

Use in sequences

RIVER and its sister terms, "brook" and "stream," can be used in a panoply of ways, including:

RIVER + FISH = SALMON, BROOK TROUT, ETC. (these are various fish that are found in rivers)

RIVER + FERRY = RIVER FERRY (various rivers around the world rely on ferries to cross)

RIVER + BOAT + CLOUD = STEAMBOAT (famed "puffing" ships that crossed rivers during the nineteenth century)

RIVER + FLAG (CHINA) (POSSIBLY + YELLOW)= YANGTZE/YELLOW RIVERS (the central rivers of China)

RIVER + FLAG (EGYPT)= NILE RIVER (the central river of Egypt and other East African nations, and the longest in the world)

RIVER + FLAG (BRAZIL/PANAMA)= AMAZON RIVER (the central river of the majority of South America, and the largest in the world by volume)

RIVER + FLAG (UNITED STATES)= MISSISSIPPI/COLORADO RIVER (the central rivers of the United States, and among the longest in the world)

As indicated, any RIVER can be paired with a nation's FLAG to denote it)

RIVER + DRAGON = WATER DRAGON (in East Asian cultures, dragons are said to inhabit certain rivers; in fact, the four “main” rivers of China are said to be the transformed bodies of ancient dragons)

RIVER + THOUGHT BALLOON= STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS (a form of writing/speaking wherein words flow non-stop without editing, like a river)

RIVER + OGRE= KAPPA (a Japanese monster said to inhabit rivers to capture small children)

RIVER + SCIENTIST= POTAMOLOGIST (one who studies rivers)

RIVER + BRIDGE + OGRE= RIVER TROLL (monsters said to hide under bridges to eat people who do not pay their tolls)

RIVER + FACTORY = EFFLUENT/WASTEWATER (the rivers and streams produced by factories as a byproduct of their work)

RIVER + UP/DOWN ARROW= UPSTREAM/DOWNSTREAM (terms for positioning along rivers; “upstream” also refers to facing difficulties, e.g. “swimming upstream”)

RIVER + LIGHTNING BOLT = HYDROPOWER (electricity derived from rivers spinning waterwheels)

RIVER + MOUTH = DELTA (the “mouth” of a river, where it meets the ocean or sea)

RIVER + PIRATE = RIVER PIRATES (robbers who attacked steamboats and large ships in the nineteenth century)

RIVER + PERSON ROWING BOAT= RIVER RAFTING (a sport, sometimes “extreme,” where people steer boats and inflatable rafts through rivers)

RIVER + TELEVISION/COMPUTER: “STREAMING” SERVICE (services like Netflix and Hulu, which provide a constant flow of entertainment)

Breaking new ground.

There are very few “non-living” objects in the NATURE category of Emoji; only MOUNTAIN currently exists. As RIVERS are crucial to humanity’s very history and still play an important role in societies today, this gap must be filled as soon as possible, which will in turn lead to a whole new emoji category: natural, non-living features of the planet. In addition, RIVER will help expand the Sports (through RIVER rafting) and Science (through hydropower) categories.

Image Distinctiveness

The proposed illustration for RIVER includes “bends” to suggest the natural shape of a RIVER; the grass and small trees to it show its place in nature. The moving toward the horizon, too, suggests the flow of RIVERS moving toward the sea. However, any illustration that clearly represents a narrow, winding body of water would be suitable.

Completeness

RIVERS and their usage in rafting will help fill in gaps in Sports emoji (a RAFT emoji might be added as a result); similarly, hydropower, derived from RIVERS, is one of the “big four” renewable energies (with solar, wind, and geothermal as the others). Finally, RIVER will help “fill in” the map of the world, alongside MOUNTAIN and DESERT.

Frequently Requested

N/A.

Selection Factors – Exclusion

Overly Specific

The RIVER emoji does not represent any one particular body of water. It is “generic” enough to be recognized as a RIVER, while not overly specific to *one* RIVER.

Open Ended

There are many “famous” RIVERS in the world--the Yangtze, the Elba, the Nile, the Amazon, the Mississippi, the Po. However, setting RIVER in different locations--such as a desert or a jungle--is a simple way to alleviate this need, as is pairing the emoji with the flag of each country (The RIVERS of the world, while distinct, do not visually look different from each other).



Images (counterclockwise from top) of the Mississippi,¹⁶ Amazon,¹⁷ and

<https://www.thoughtco.com/amazon-river-overview-1435530>

¹⁷

<https://www.thoughtco.com/amazon-river-overview-1435530>

Yangtze Rivers¹⁸, demonstrating that these bodies are impossible to identify by sight alone.



Already Representable

Nothing in the current Unicode Library represents RIVER, and even combining other emoji cannot accurately capture its unique appearance and function; they are unique bodies with unique functions.

Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

There are some celebrities named RIVER—*River* Phoenix comes to mind—but the concept of a RIVER in general is not owned by any one company, corporation, or individual. There are some river gods in world mythologies as well—Mami Wata of Western African nations, Chalchiuhtlicue of the Aztec, Hopi of the Egyptians—but again, the general RIVER image does not denote any one in particular.

Transient

RIVERS have flowed for eons—the earliest human civilizations were settled alongside them—and they are still used for trade, agriculture, travel, and hydropower to this day. They are not going anywhere—except the ocean!

¹⁸

https://s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/mundy.assets.d3r.com/images/hero_large/34356-yangtze-river-cruises.jpg

Faulty Comparison

The shape, location, and purpose of RIVERS—when compared to existing emojis like WAVE and OCEAN—separate them from these other concepts.

Exact Images

There are many RIVERS in the world, but no one specific image is needed to capture the concept; a “generic” RIVER, like the one provided, accurately represents the body.

Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type:

Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored:

N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping:

Simple Lowercase Mapping:

Simple Titlecase Mapping:

Author Biographies

Christian Krenek (Christian.Krennek@gmail.com) grew up in Toms River, New Jersey, and currently lives along the Charles River in Boston, Massachusetts--so there is no better person to write a river emoji proposal! A conservationist and author, he owes a great debt to the rivers and streams of the world. He thanks you for reading his proposal, and hopes its acceptance will be *streamlined*!