

Chautauqua Description

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Water: The Ubiquitous Chemical

It can be argued that water is the single most important substance in the histories of the Earth and mankind alike. This single substance, composed of very simple molecules, continues to have a huge impact on our lives. Our planet is, in many ways, a water world. However, from a chemist's point of view, water is quite the odd substance. It does not behave in 'normal' ways that are characteristic of nearly every other substance known. We will explore the reasons for this chemical weirdness, and we will see that the strange behavior of water follows directly from a few fundamental scientific principles. Furthermore, water's odd properties are exactly why it is so important in our everyday lives. We will explore how the physical and chemical properties of water lead to its prevalence and importance in our world. Finally, we will discuss environmental, legal, geopolitical, and ethical issues related to water use and misuse.