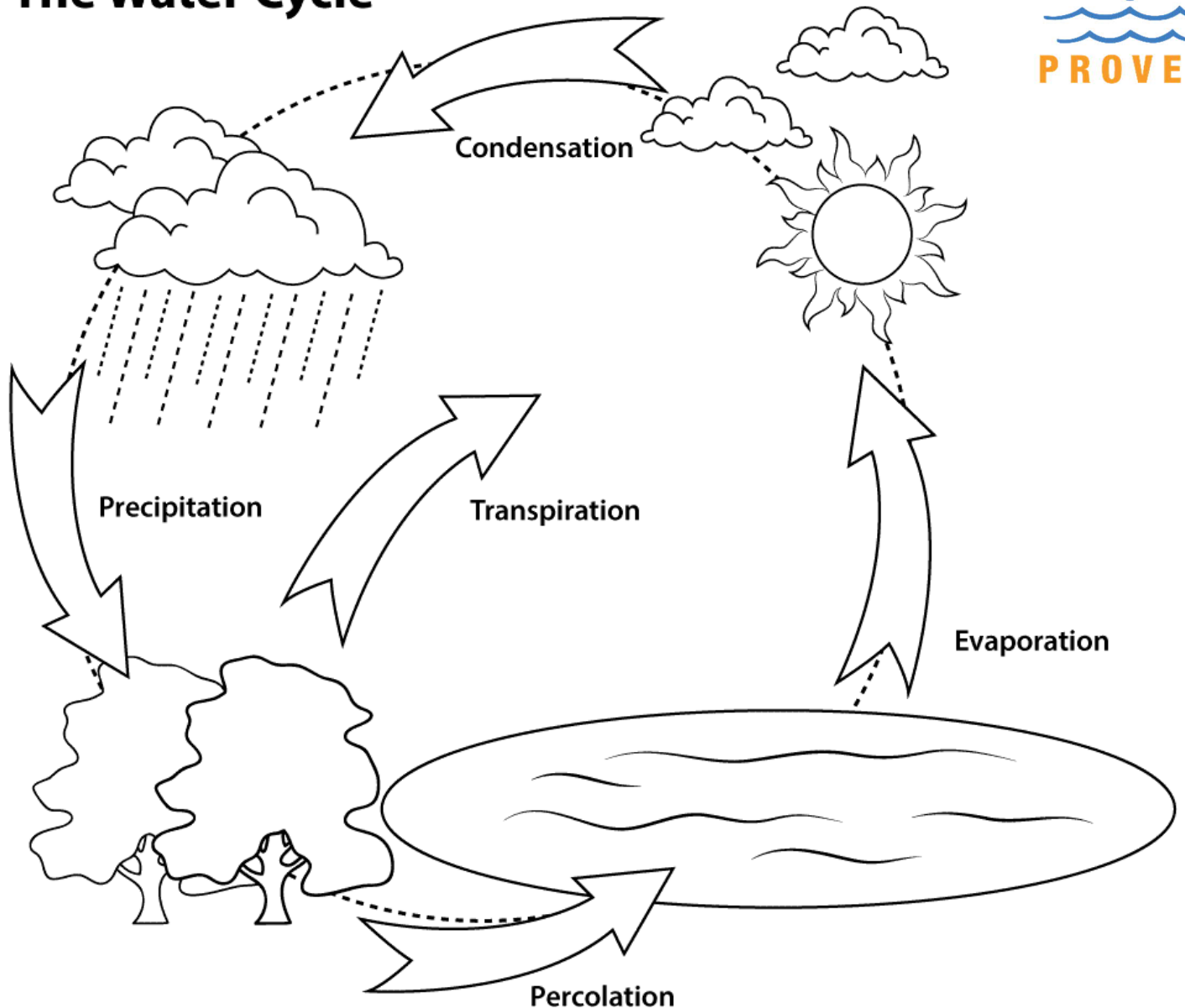


The Water Cycle



The Water Cycle (also known as the hydrologic cycle) is the journey water takes as it circulates from the land to the sky and back again.

The Sun's heat provides energy to evaporate water from the Earth's surface (oceans, lakes, etc.). Plants also lose water to the air (this is called transpiration). The water vapor eventually condenses, forming tiny droplets in clouds. When the clouds meet cool air over land, precipitation (rain, sleet, or snow) is triggered, and water returns to the land (or sea). Some of the precipitation soaks into the ground. Some of the underground water is trapped between rock or clay layers; this is called groundwater. But most of the water flows downhill as runoff (above ground or underground), eventually returning to the seas as slightly salty water.