

DataHaven

Classroom Materials

Title of Material: Environmental Racism

Topics Discussed: Environmental racism, climate change, climate abuse, social justice

Skills Utilized: Reading skills, annotations, research, problem solving, social justice

Format: Research can be done individually or in partners.

In Person or Online: Either

Procedure/Instruction Suggestions:

The given examples (impact of climate change, the Dakota Access Pipeline decision, the handling of recent natural disasters in Puerto Rico, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color) are good research options that have ample resources and research available, but students can also propose their own examples. Make sure they know what is considered a reputable source, or give them a list of websites to research from.

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Environmental Racism

Directions: Read and annotate the background information on environmental racism and how it impacts individuals. You will be researching one of the present day examples of environmental racism, then answering the thought questions.

Background:

The connection between changes in the environment and racism in America has a deep and dark history. Since before the founding of the nation, racist policies and institutions widely discriminated against some Americans: Native Americans, Black Americans, Latinx Americans, Asian Americans, and other groups who were not considered white. This impacted their freedom, their rights, their safety, their education, their health, their housing, their wealth opportunities, their employment, their families, and every other aspect of their lives. Generation after generation, these policies and institutions continued to do more harm. Today, we are still facing this harm, as it perpetuates after hundreds of years of accumulating, and are seeing more and more ways that the communities targeted are harmed. Some of these impacts are not what we usually think about when we consider the legacy of racism.

As defined by Green Action, a grassroots activism group formed in 1997 to combat environmental racism, “environmental racism refers to the institutional rules, regulations, policies or government and/or corporate decisions that deliberately target certain communities for locally undesirable land uses and lax enforcement of zoning and environmental laws, resulting in communities being disproportionately exposed to toxic and hazardous waste based upon race. Environmental racism is caused by several factors, including intentional neglect, the alleged need for a receptacle for pollutants in urban areas, and a lack of institutional power and low land values of people of color. It is a well-documented fact that communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by polluting industries (and very specifically, hazardous waste facilities) and lax regulation of these industries.”

In 2018, an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report showed that environmental racism was a real concern for the nation, stating, “as this FY18 Environmental Justice Progress Report shows, we are providing greater certainty to our federal, states, tribal and local partners; certainty in EPA programs; and certainty in how we communicate risk. This certainty will help to strengthen environmental and public health protections for low-income, minority, indigenous, and disadvantaged communities that are disproportionately likely to live near contaminated lands or be impacted by environmental hazards.” However, in the same year, they reduced regulations on pollution.

An example of environmental racism is the mishandling of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, as communities of color did not receive government recovery aid when they desperately needed it. In recent years, there have been detrimental examples of environmental racism, including the impact of climate change, the Dakota Access Pipeline decision, the handling of recent natural disasters in Puerto Rico, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color. These examples prove that this issue is a perpetuating concern that needs to be addressed.

Research: Pick one of the following examples of environmental racism and research its origin, impact, how it's being addressed, and possible solutions. Make sure your sources are credible and approved by your teacher. You must write in complete sentences.

Examples: Impact of climate change, the Dakota Access Pipeline decision, the handling of recent natural disasters in Puerto Rico, the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color.

Your chosen example:	
Summary of the crisis (how did it begin and who is involved):	
Impact of the crisis (what groups are impacted, how is the environment impacted, how does the environmental impact hurt the groups):	
Addressing of the crisis (what has been done by impacted groups, activist groups, government, etc.):	
Possible outcomes of the crisis (what could long term damage lead to?):	
Possible solutions to the crisis (how can the harm be stopped, how can the groups be helped, what groups could offer support, how you could offer support):	

Thought Questions:

1. How did you find your research on your topic? Was it difficult or easy to find reliable information?
2. How did you come up with your solutions? Do you think that they are attainable (meaning you could achieve them in a timely manner, with the resources on hand, and with the allies you have)?
3. Why is it important to learn about the different “types” of racism?
4. Are you optimistic about environmental racism coming to an end? Why or why not?