

Environmental justice

with the AIRE team

Talking points

Comprehension

1. Why is the Salton Sea shrinking?
2. What problems are caused by the shrinking of the Salton Sea?
3. How are communities in Imperial Valley tackling the issue of air pollution?

Application

4. What questions do you think the team asks to learn more about children's lifestyles, home environments and day-to-day activities? What influences do you think these factors have on a child's respiratory health?
5. How do you think strategies such as creating wetlands, planting native grasses and erecting barriers might help reduce the amount of dust reaching communities? What social, environmental and economic pros and cons can you think of for each strategy?
6. What examples of environmental injustice exist in your local area or country? How is the issue being addressed, or what is preventing justice from being achieved? How could you contribute to the solution?

Analysis

7. Why is it important that scientists from the University of Southern California built upon the ongoing work led by the Comité Civico del Valle, rather than arriving in Imperial Valley with their own research agenda?
8. Why do you think poor and marginalised communities are disproportionately harmed by environmental hazards and mismanagement?
9. Initial conversations about the shrinking Salton Sea were focused on the damage to the environment and local ecosystems, not on the impacts these damages had on community health. Why do you think this was? Why is it essential that all campaigns to protect the environment consider the needs of local communities as a key component?

Synthesis

10. How do the attitudes and actions of societies, governments and companies need to change so that the burden of providing proof of the effects of environmental hazards no longer falls on affected communities?
11. If you were a policymaker in Imperial Valley, how would you go about creating a policy for the management of the Salton Sea?

Evaluation

12. Of the many career opportunities that contribute to environmental justice, which most interests you, and why?
13. To what extent do you agree that 'climate change is the ultimate case of environmental injustice'?



Activities

Time to take action

Providing scientific evidence of the links between environmental hazards and public health is essential for achieving environmental justice. But this is not the end of the story. Communities and their collaborators then need to convince policymakers to take action to prevent further harm from occurring.

Imagine that the AIRE study has finished, and the team has established a strong scientific link between the shrinking Salton Sea, high levels of particulate matter (PM) and poor respiratory health in children in Imperial Valley. You are tasked with presenting the study's findings to policymakers and relevant stakeholders (e.g., those who make decisions surrounding water usage, agricultural practices, air quality and community support) and persuading them to take action.

Design an engaging presentation that clearly explains the following:

- The evidence behind the causes of poor respiratory health in local children.
- The scale of the issue and its effects on local communities.
- Proposed solutions, possibly including ways to:
 - o reduce air pollution
 - o support public health for local communities
 - o grant agency and decision-making capacities to local communities
 - o hold polluters accountable
 - o preserve the Salton Sea and its ecosystems.
- What policymakers need to do next, possibly including:
 - o How they should enact these solutions
 - o Who should be included in any discussions
 - o How issues around regional water usage, agricultural practices, air quality and community support will be addressed
 - o How communities will be supported as they take control of their own health, environment and future.



Deliver your presentation to your classmates. Encourage them to take on the roles of different audience members (e.g., government policymaker, farmer, parent of an asthmatic child, community health worker, etc.) and ask you questions about the concerns that different stakeholders are likely to have.

Community education

Design an infographic, leaflet or poster to educate parents about the effects of the shrinking Salton Sea on their children's health. Your infographic, leaflet or poster should:

- Be eye-catching and engaging
- Explain how the shrinking of the Salton Sea can lead to respiratory diseases such as asthma using clear language and/or diagrams
- Provide information about what parents can do to protect their children's health.

Make a difference in your community

What environmental injustices exist in your community or local area? If you live in California, Jill recommends using CalEnviroScreen (www.oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen) as a tool to learn about the environmental burden in your community.

EJScreen (www.epa.gov/ejscreen) fulfils a similar function for the whole of the US.

How could you help address these issues and fight for environmental justice in your community? For example, you could start a school campaign to address pollution in your area or write to your government representative demanding action on a local environmental hazard.

Make a difference in the world

Get involved in a campaign to end environmental injustice and promote justice for all communities. Find a local, national or global organisation that promotes community and environmental health and well-being. For example, you could take part in a climate march, sign a petition calling for action on a topic that matters to you or join a national campaign organised by a society such as the Environmental Justice Foundation (www.ejfoundation.org), the Natural Resources Defense Council (www.nrdc.org/issues/equity-justice) or Greenpeace (www.greenpeace.org/international/get-involved).

More resources

- Visit the team's Futurum webpage to find the article and activity sheet in Spanish: www.futurumcareers.com/combining-science-and-community-action-to-combat-environmental-injustice
- Find out more about the AIRE study: envhealthcenters.usc.edu/usc-aire-childrens-study
- View air quality around the Salton Sea in real-time through the CCV's community air monitoring network: www.ivan-imperial.org/air
- This article explores the Salton Sea crisis in rich narrative detail: www.undark.org/2023/07/03/scientists-warned-of-a-salton-sea-disaster-no-one-listened
- This video explains the context behind the environmental justice movement and why it is so important: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dREtXUij6_c
- Learn about the history of the environmental justice movement: www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement
- This article explains how NASA data is being used to support environmental justice efforts: www.earthdata.nasa.gov/learn/backgrounders/environmental-justice
- Learn more about the environmental justice work supported by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment: www.oehha.ca.gov/environmental-justice