

# Climate Change and Social Justice

**Learning Objectives**

Students will:

- Compare responses to the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill and the pollution caused by the oil industry in Nigeria.
- Discuss how the economic growth of wealthy countries has impacted both poorer countries and the environment.
- Define the term, “climate debt” based on textual information.
- Analyze a proposed plan for wealthy countries to pay Ecuador not to sell its oil.
- Write arguments to explain their position on the strategy of having wealthy countries compensate poorer countries for not exploiting their oil reserves.

**Themes**

- Climate Debt
- Climate Justice
- Social Inequality
- Legacy of Colonialism
- Economic Development

**Materials Needed**

All materials are available for download at [thischangeseverything.org/studyguide](https://thischangeseverything.org/studyguide).

**Book excerpts:**

- “Niger Delta” (p. 305-306, *This Changes Everything*)
- “Climate Debt” (p. 408-409, *This Changes Everything*)
- Go Further: “Polluter Pays Principle” (p. 115-116, *This Changes Everything*)

**Handout:** Climate Debt Analysis (p. 23-24 of this guide)

**Activities**

1. Have students watch this three-minute news story about the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. Focus student viewing by asking them to note how people responded to the disaster and the lingering effects of the spill more than 25 years later.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/21-years-later-exxon-valdez-scars-still-healing/>

2. Show the location of Nigeria on a map:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location\\_Nigeria\\_AU\\_Africa.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_Nigeria_AU_Africa.svg)

Explain that Nigeria used to be a British colony, which claimed the legal right to the oil in Nigeria and allowed companies to extract and export it to industrialized nations. Then have students read the *This Changes Everything* book excerpt, "Niger Delta" (p. 305-306, *This Changes Everything*).

Discuss:

- What impact did the economic growth of wealthy nations have on the people of Nigeria and the environment?
- How would Americans react if, every year, an Exxon Valdez-worth of oil spilled into waterways in one of their communities? Why do you think so much oil has been allowed to spill in the Niger Delta for more than fifty years? How do you explain the disparities in how problems are solved for different people?

3. Explain that wealthy countries have prospered by using fossil fuels like oil and coal to power their industries, but in the process, they have polluted the planet and emitted massive quantities of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide that trap heat in the atmosphere. To prevent even more environmental damage, poor countries need to develop differently, but they don't have the resources on their own to make that happen.

4. Point out the location of Ecuador on a map:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ecuador\\_\(orthographic\\_projection\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ecuador_(orthographic_projection).svg)

Tell the class that Ecuador is the home of Yasuní National Park and ask them to read the *This Changes Everything* book excerpt, "Climate Debt" (p. 408-409, *This Changes Everything*). Then have students work in pairs or small groups to respond to the questions on the Climate Debt Analysis handout.

5. Conclude by having each student take a position on whether or not they would back the Yasuní plan. Students should write an argument that explains their view and uses valid reasoning and relevant evidence to support it.

**Go Further**

- Delve deeper into environmental racism. Explain to students that the Niger Delta is an example of a “sacrifice zone.” Klein describes sacrifice zones as places that, “...[s]omehow don’t count and therefore can be poisoned, drained, or otherwise destroyed, for the supposed greater good of economic progress.” She points out that people who live on these lands get sacrificed too, because they typically lack political power due to some combination of race, language, and class.
- Then, read Klein’s article, “Why #BlackLivesMatter Should Transform the Climate Debate” (<http://www.thenation.com/article/192801/what-does-blacklivesmatter-have-do-climate-change>) and talk about the connections made by the article between race and climate change. Research other examples of sacrifice zones closer to home (for example, New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina). Have students share their examples and evaluate whether each meets Klein’s definition of a sacrifice zone.
- Explore strategies for raising money from the wealthy to help cover the costs to transition away from fossil fuels. Read the *This Changes Everything* book excerpt, “Polluter Pays Principle” (p. 115-116, *This Changes Everything*), and discuss which of the options outlined in the text you would support and why. What additional or alternative ideas can you contribute?
- Explain and respond in writing to this quote: “There is no fight for the environment that does not require a fight for social justice. Nor can you have a struggle for social justice if there is no fight for the environment.”
- For additional teaching materials on climate change and social justice, visit the Climate Justice in BC (<http://teachclimatejustice.ca/>) and Movement Generation (<http://movementgeneration.org/resources/curriculum-tools/>) websites.

**Handout Lesson 3**

**Climate Debt Analysis**

Instructions: read the excerpt "Climate Debt" (p. 115-116) from the book *This Changes Everything*, then respond to the questions below.

1. According to the text, what is "climate debt?" Who owes what to whom? Why?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. Explain the Yasuní plan in your own words.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. How does the Yasuní plan propose using the funds that would be collected as payment for the climate debt?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

4. Predict how the following people would react to the Yasuní plan. Justify your response:

- CEO of the Ecuadoran state oil company Petroequador
- President of Ecuador
- Leader of a wealthy country asked to pay Ecuador to not drill for its oil

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

5. What might be the outcomes for people and the planet if wealthy countries were to pay for developing countries to grow their economies using clean energy? What might be the outcomes if they did not provide funds?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. What other ideas do you have for helping poor countries to develop economically in ways that support both people and the environment?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---