

## **AMBIENT Critical Reading – Environmental Justice**

### **Purpose**

To learn about the issue of environmental justice, while reading critically to discern an author's political perspective or underlying recommendations.

### **Overview**

Two articles are presented which are factually accurate and well written. Students must define terms, find answers to questions from the articles and identify the main ideas of the articles. Students then compare and contrast the conclusions drawn by each author to identify differing perspectives.

### **Time**

One to two class periods with required reading homework to be done prior.

### **Key Concepts**

Underprivileged segments of society bear a disproportionate burden of environmental health risk.

Socioeconomic factors and race play a part in environmental injustice.

The issue of environmental injustice is political and contentious.

### **Skills**

Finding definitions

Reading carefully for facts

Identifying the main idea of a written work

Understanding persuasive writing

Contrasting viewpoints

### **Materials**

Students should have their own copy of each article so they can complete the assignment individually:

- ❖ "Saving Our Backyard: Toxic Waste in a Small Louisiana Town" by Ziba Kashef, Essence, Sept. 1999
- ❖ "The Environmental Racism Hoax" by David Friedman, American Enterprise Nov.-Dec. 1998

Worksheets provided

### **Facilitator Preparation**

Teachers should read, both articles and the provided keys. Teachers may want to bring in current issues of the selected magazines so students can look at them to see current articles, ads, photos, etc. This will help them understand the context of the selections and better answer the worksheet questions. Teachers with web access can show the students the magazines' websites, especially those pages that describe the demographic characteristics of their readership. This information might also be contained in the website under the advertising section.

## Background

This exercise examines two articles from the mainstream media that present the issue of environmental justice to the public at large. To understand the environmental justice one must rely on statistics and personal anecdotes, both of which can be easily manipulated to present a particular perspective. Advocates of environmental justice expect the government to help protect communities from environmental harm. Business people, however, do not want to be limited in how they do business, and fear the loss of business due to over-regulation. Policymakers are put in the place of having to decide how to protect the public's health without damaging the economy.

After the final discussion, students should understand that while it is possible to agree on some basic facts of a problem, people often disagree on what solutions should be implemented.

Some interesting websites on this subject include:

- [http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/publications/ej/ej\\_bib.html](http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/publications/ej/ej_bib.html)
  - <http://www.ecojustice.net/bib/>
  - <http://www.nyu.edu/pages/elc/ej/>
- <http://sis.nlm.nih.gov/Tox/environmentaljustice.html>

## Procedure

1. Assign the readings the night before the day of the exercise.
2. Students read the article carefully, making notes in the margin if they wish.
3. Students complete the worksheet.
4. Open a discussion on the issue of environmental justice. Why is this a contentious issue?

## Further Investigation

The **Debate/Role Play**, which follows this exercise in the module, is a logical follow-up to ideas presented here

Have students find similar articles in the media and/or scientific literature representing different points of view on the environmental justice issue. These can be discussed and presented orally in class, and/or briefly summarized in summary paragraphs.

### **Student Assessment**

Teachers can collect the work sheet and grade it for accuracy and completion. During discussion, teachers should note if students seem to follow the arguments being made by the various articles, and be able to identify each magazine's target market. Students should demonstrate that they have completed the readings. How do they tailor their message to their audience? Why is environmental justice an interesting topic for their readers? How does a reader find the "truth" about a contentious topic?



7) Define or identify in your own words the following terms from each article. Use a dictionary for unfamiliar terms.

Incinerator

Emissions

Dioxin

NAACP

Greenpeace

Grievance

Congressional Black Caucus

Septuagenarian

Galvanized

Ambiguity

Noxious

Spate

Disparate

Moot

Synergistic

Capricious