

# Environmental and Climate Justice Definitions & History WebQuest

*Designed for all Teachers to use for Background Knowledge, and for 6-12th grade teachers to use directly with students*

Resources developed by San Mateo County Office of Education's (SMCOE)  
[Environmental Literacy and Sustainability Initiative \(ELSI\)](#) • Last updated July 2020

## Purpose and Overview





WebQuests are a self-directed learning tool that helps you construct your own learning. You take the wheel, and determine which sources are most useful. *This WebQuest provides well vetted resources that define the concept of environmental justice, and how this movement has evolved over time.* In this WebQuest you can:








- **Choose the Order** - Explore resources in any order you want. Take a moment to scan through the entire document so you can choose where you want to start. YOU DO NOT need to start at the top!
- **Choose the Duration** - Some resources you might glance through quickly, while others you might spend more time reading carefully.
- **Choose to “Go Beyond”** - Consider the resources in the WebQuest as a starting point for your inquiry. Let the links take you to other sources that deepen your learning.
- **Engage in Thoughtful Reflection:** As you check out resources, you are encouraged to construct meaning of the topics and issues by responding to any or all of the following prompts:
  - After exploring multiple definitions and examples of environmental justice, what is your own definition of environmental justice?
  - How has the movement for environmental justice evolved over time?
  - What trends do you see in the issues present across these events?
  - How have community groups responded to issues of injustice in their cities?
  - What role does the government play in both perpetuating and alleviating environmental injustice?

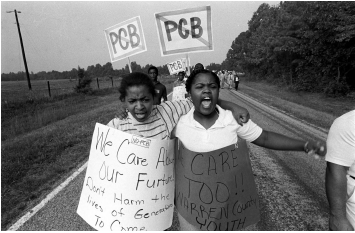
## I. Environmental Justice Definitions, Principles, and Tools

<b>Environmental Injustice</b>  <a href="#">Mapping Environmental Injustice</a> and <a href="#">EJOLT</a>	Environmental injustice can be defined as the disproportionate exposure of communities of color and the poor to pollution, and its concomitant effects on health and environment, as well as the unequal environmental protection and environmental quality provided through laws, regulations, governmental programs, enforcement, and policies. This term arose from the fact that some communities are disproportionately subjected to higher levels of environmental risk than other segments of society.
<b>Environmental Equity</b>	Environmental equity describes a country, or world, in which no single group or community faces disadvantages in dealing with environmental hazards, disasters, or pollution.

<p><b>Environmental Justice</b></p> 	<p>The EPA defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.” Read more about the EPA’s work with environmental justice, how they’re currently taking action, and explore their mapping tool, called EJScreen, to learn more about environmental injustices nationwide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Definition and Resources</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Timeline</a></li> <li>• EPA’s Environmental Justice Strategy (2016-2020): <a href="#">EJ 2020 Action Agenda</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">EJScreen</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences</b></p>  <p>Kids Environment Kids Health</p>	<p>The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences has a website dedicated to educating students about the relationship of youth and the environment, including environmental justice. Students can learn what environmental justice really means, some examples of an unhealthy environment and how people are impacted, and what can be done to help:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Environmental Justice... What does that mean?</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit</b></p> 	<p>In late October of 1991, 300 people of color from around the country gathered for the first ever National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. The leaders at this Summit developed the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice, reshaping discussions around environmental issues to be more equitable and inclusive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Principles of Environmental Justice</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)</b></p> 	<p>California was one of the first U.S. states to include environmental justice in their legislation. In 2012, a Senate Bill was passed that requires CalEPA to prioritize environmental and climate change related projects in disadvantaged communities, leading to CalEPA’s Environmental Justice Program/Task Force:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• California <a href="#">Senate Bill 535</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Environmental Justice Task Force</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Environmental Justice Program</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>No Coal in Oakland</b></p> 	<p>No Coal in Oakland, like the name implies, is a grassroots organization whose goal is to stop the transport of coal into Oakland for export overseas at the port. They provide a robust definition of environmental justice in a local context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Environmental Justice Definition and Local Context</a></li> <li>• No Coal in Oakland <a href="#">Video Overview</a> (6 min)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Forbes Article: <a href="#">Ten Ways that Racial and Environmental Justice are Inextricably Linked</a></b></p>	<p>This <a href="#">Forbes article</a>, written in June 2020, outlines ten ways that racial and environmental justice are linked - for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental issues disproportionately impact people of color</li> <li>• Environmental policies often penalize people of color</li> <li>• Cultural appropriation in the environmental movement</li> <li>• The need for more diverse representation in leadership and investment in the environmental movement</li> </ul>

## II. History of Environmental Justice and Case Studies/Individual Stories

<p><b><u>Environmental Justice Explained</u> - Grist</b></p> 	<p>In cities, race-based zoning and planning policies, as well as poor land use practices, are two of the main causes for urban environmental injustices. Some solutions that have been proposed, like carbon-offsets and cap-and-trade policies, feed into the problems rather than fix them. Rural areas have lots of natural resources that are extracted at unsustainable rates, stripping the land and contaminating it along the way. Watch this <a href="#">short 4 minute video</a> to learn about the history of environmental justice in urban, rural, and international settings.</p>
<p><b><u>Environmental Justice Overview from NRDC</u></b></p> 	<p>Read <a href="#">this short overview</a> by the National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) about how the Environmental Justice Movement began. Additional resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Environmental Justice Video</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Four Environmental Justice Champions You Should Know</a></li> </ul>
<p><b><u>A Brief History of Environmental Justice</u> - ProPublica</b></p> 	<p>Watch this <a href="#">brief 4 minute video</a> about the history of the nationwide environmental justice movement. It begins with the one of the first events that caught national attention in Warren County, North Carolina, where protests were held to combat the proposed toxic landfill coming to the predominantly African American community in 1982, and leads up all the way to the Trump Administration rolling back environmental regulations in 2017.</p>
<p><b><u>EPA Environmental Justice Timeline</u></b></p> 	<p>This <a href="#">timeline</a> shows the U.S. EPA's involvement in the environmental justice movement and the major events that have played out - this is not meant to be an all inclusive history of the movement in general. The timeline begins with the Memphis Sanitation Strikes in 1968 and ends in 2016 when the EPA developed their final framework for the EJ 2020 Action Agenda.</p>
<p><b><u>Sanitation Workers' Strike - Memphis, TN</u></b></p> 	<p>In 1968, over a thousand African-American sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee went on strike in response to the city's lack of action after another incident of dangerous work conditions and poor treatment of Black employees led to the death of two garbage collectors. Martin Luther King Jr. joined the strikes periodically from February through April before he was assassinated the night after speaking to a crowd of sanitation workers. A couple of weeks later, the union of workers was recognized and they were promised higher wages - though just a few months later, the union had to continue to fight for the city to follow through on its commitment. Read more here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike</a> - Stanford University</li> <li>• <a href="#">What the environmental justice movement owes Martin Luther King Jr.</a> - Grist</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Love Canal - Niagara Falls, NY</u></b></p> 	<p>Between 1942 and 1953, Hooker Chemical Company used a partially dug out canal, known as Love Canal, in Niagara Falls to dump toxic chemicals. The company capped the landfill and sold the land to the Niagara Falls School Board with a warning in order to remove liability from their hands. After many grassroots surveys were conducted in the 1970s, an environmental health disaster was brought to light in the Love Canal neighborhood. Activists, led by working-class women of the neighborhood, were dismissed for years by state officials until a federal emergency was declared in 1978. Learn more about the Love Canal environmental disaster:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Love Canal: A Brief History</a> - SUNY Geneseo</li> <li>• <a href="#">The Love Canal Disaster: Toxic Waste in the Neighborhood</a> - New York Times Video (11 min)</li> <li>• <a href="#">A history of the Love Canal disaster. 1893-1998</a> - The Buffalo News</li> </ul>

<p><b>PCB Landfill Protests - Warren County, NC</b></p> 	<p>After years of illegally dumping toxic chemicals along the streets of North Carolina, the dumpers and owner of the Ward Transformer Company who were responsible were briefly jailed and fined - but the contaminated soil they had created needed to be removed. North Carolina's governor at the time chose Warren County, a low-income and predominantly Black community, to be the location of the landfill where the toxic soil would be dumped. Residents opposed the landfill for years, but the state and EPA relented, loosening regulations along their way to make it easier to build the landfill. While the protests and civil unrest led by community members didn't stop the site from being built, it resulted in the election of many black officials and is given credit for the birth of the national environmental justice movement. Not until 2003 was the landfill decontaminated as the community never stopped fighting for environmental justice. Learn more about the protests below, including a video of and article by the founder of the environmental justice movement, Robert Bullard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Robert Bullard - The Genesis of Environmental Justice</a> - A Fierce Green Fire Video (3 min)</li> <li>• <a href="#">25th anniversary of the Warren County PCB Landfill Protests</a> - Dissident Voice</li> <li>• <a href="#">The EPA chose this county for a toxic dump because its residents were 'few, black, and poor'</a> - Medium</li> </ul>
<p><b><a href="#">Mayah's Lot</a> an animated video story of environmental injustices</b></p>	<p>Mayah's Lot serves as an educational tool for youth who live in communities burdened by environmental injustices. It follows the story of the young hero/protagonist, Mayah, who takes action to mobilize community members and prevent the dumping of toxic waste in their neighborhood.</p>

### III. Environmentalism and Environmental/Climate Justice - A Focus on Anti-Racism and the inclusion of BIPOC Voices

The following resources provide a starting point for the why, how, and who of integrating anti-racism and BIPOC voices into a study of environmentalism, and environmental/climate justice efforts.

**A) Articles and Blogs:** *These articles and blogs can be used for teachers to build background knowledge, or by secondary students to explore as an activity*

- The Years Project - [Why Environmentalists Need to Make Space for BIPOC and How](#)
- United Nations Environmental Programme (2017): Indigenous People and Nature - [A Tradition of Conservation](#)
- PEW (2019): [Cities, Tribes Try a New Environmental Approach: Give Nature Rights](#)
- WBUR (2020): [Racial Justice Is Climate Justice: Why The Climate Movement Needs To Be Anti-Racist](#)
- Vice News (2020): [It's Time for Environmental Studies to Own Up to Erasing Black People](#)
- WIPO Magazine (2020): [Climate Action and Sustainability: Indigenous People are a Part of the Solution](#)
- Alliance for Climate Education (2020) - Eight BIPOC Environmentalists You Should Know: <https://acespace.org/2020/09/14/8-bipoc-environmentalists/>
- Honoring the Roots of Environmentalism - [The Need to Elevate BIPOC Voices Back into Environmentalism](#) (2021)
- Greenpeace (2021) - "[Eight Black Environmentalists You Need to Know](#)" (Feb 2020), and "[Why Race Matters when Talking about the Environment - An interview with Dr. Robert Bullard](#)" (2018)

B) **Student Facing Resources:** These resources are student facing and can be used in a variety of ways

- TK-12 - EcoRise (2021): [Environmental Justice Hero Posters](#) - also see [EcoRise Environmental Justice curriculum resources](#)
- 3 - 12 - [Bioneers Indigeneity](#): Indigeneity is a Native-led Program within Bioneers that promotes Indigenous approaches to solve the earth's most pressing environmental and social issues.
- 6 - 12 [Environmentalism Text set](#): This list of texts (or excerpts of texts) includes many BIPOC voices. A sample activity for using this resource is the [Environmentalism Readings Jigsaw](#).

## IV. GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUES

Across the world communities are struggling to defend their land, air, water, forests and their livelihoods from damaging projects and extractive activities with heavy environmental and social impacts: mining, dams, tree plantations, fracking, gas flaring, incinerators, etc. Explore the following resources to build a background understanding of environmental justice around the world:

- The Conversation: [Tracking the battles for environmental justice: here are the world's top 10](#).
- EJ Atlas: The Environmental Justice Atlas (EJ Atlas) documents and catalogs social conflict around the globe for these environmental issues. Explore the [EJ Atlas](#) and learn more about some of the examples identified in the previous article.

## V. INTRODUCTION TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

Climate Justice acknowledges that developing nations, people of color, and lower income communities are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Solutions on climate change need to come from the community level and prioritize the health of communities and ecosystems in decision making.

Explore any or all of the following resources to become more familiar with Climate Justice:

- Article - Bronx Climate Justice North: [What is Climate Justice?](#)
- Video - Climate Justice Alliance: [Frontline Youth](#)
- Article - [Black Lives Matter: The Link Between Climate Change and Racial Justice](#)
- Article - [NAACP on Environmental and Climate Justice](#)
- GreenPeace - [The Story of Climate Justice](#)
- Podcast and Article: The [Inseparable Link between Climate Change and Racial Justice](#)

Information and Prose texts on climate justice, check out the following:

- Mary Robinson
  - Video Overview: [Climate Justice and Sustainability](#)
  - Excerpts from [Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future: Learning from Lived Experience and A Seat at the Table](#)
- [All We Can Save](#): Nurturing a welcoming, connected, and leaderful climate community, rooted in the work and wisdom of women, to grow a life-giving future.
- [Rise: From One Island to Another](#) - a poetic exchange between the Marshall Islands and Greenland