

Global Teacher Seminar Lesson Plan

Emily de Jong

“A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.” - FDR (1935)

Title: American Cold War Environmentalism and Environmental Policy

Theme/Topic: Political Debates During Cold War America

Introduction: In this lesson, students will examine the rise of the ideology of Western Environmentalism within America, as well as its subsequent impact on American deforestation. This lesson asks learners to examine a case study of how China’s environmental policy has affected its deforestation rates. By the end of the lesson, students will put forth a hypothesis about American deforestation, as it is informed by American environmental policy.

Subject(s)/Grade level(s): American History (10th or 11th Grade Learners)

Suggested Duration of Lesson: 50 mins.

Connection to Standards/Common Core (1-2 standards):

Ohio USHist Standard 30: “Political debates [during 1945-1995 and onwards] focused on the extent of the role of government in the economy, environmental protection, social welfare, and national security.”

Essential Questions (1-2 questions):

- [EQ1] How has environmental policy informed the way America has acted internationally?
- [EQ2] How has Western Environmentalism shaped American deforestation?

Learning Objectives (2-3 objectives):

- [LO1] SWBAT analyze how American environmental policy determines its deforestation rates.
- [LO2] SWBAT explain the impact Western Environmentalism has had on North American Deforestation.

Vocabulary

- Western Environmentalism
- Deforestation
- Tree cover
- Environmental Policy

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Slides

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- Entrance Ticket (with questions listed below)
- Then-And-Now Images
- Worksheet (with questions listed below)
- [Deforestation in China](#)
- [Worldmapper Treecover/Forests in 2005](#)
- [Slide 20 of Prof. Williams' Slides \(On China's Historical Forest Cover\)](#)
- [Forest History after WWII](#)
- "Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture." - Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*
- "But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself." - Rachel Carson, *The Silent Spring of Rachel Carson*
- "A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people." - FDR (1935)
- [PBS Timeline of Modern Environmentalism](#)

Pre-Assessment of Prior Knowledge:

- Students walk into class to the tune of Joni Mitchell's *Big Yellow Taxi* (1970).

"... They took all the trees/ Put 'em in a tree museum/ And they charged all the people an arm and a leg just to see 'em..."

- **Bellringer Activity:** Display Then-and-Now images about the American Environmental movement and ask students to fill out entrance tickets with introductory questions:
 - What could the context of these two images be?
 - What are some differences between the two pictures? Similarities?
 - How might these images signify change? How might they not?
 - What do you know about North American Environmentalism? About Environmentalism globally?

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(1960s)



(2020)

Teacher-Student Interaction:

1. With slides, explain [to students] A timeline of Western Environmentalism and the importance of
 - a. The publication Aldo Leopold's Sand County Almanac (1949)
 - b. The publication of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring (1962)
 - c. The 'Hippie' movement (the 1960s) and the creation of Earth Day (1975)
 - d. as well as Al Gore's political campaign platform (1988)
 - e. to show how Western Environmentalism during this period became more mainstream.
2. In small groups (3-4), students work together and use their knowledge about America's prior historical context with Western Environmentalism to make their own hypothesis about what America's environmental policy may have looked like both before and during 1945-1995.
3. Students share their small group ideas with the whole class.
4. Students investigate a case study including data ([Deforestation in China](#), [Worldmapper Treecover/Forests in 2005](#), & [Slide 20 of Prof. Williams' Slides \(On China's Historical Forest Cover\)](#)) illustrating the impact that Chinese environmental policy has had upon Chinese deforestation rates.
5. In pairs, students answer a worksheet based on the slides and case study with two sets of questions (and cite their sources):
 - a. "How did China view the Environment?"
 - i. "Is this view different than Western Environmentalism?"
 - b. "How did China subsequently handle Environmental policy?"
 - c. "What can we learn from how China handled Environmental policy?"
 - d. "Do you think we will see parallels to how America handles Environmental policy?"

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- e. “What similarities or differences do you think might exist between the ways that China and America think about the Environment?”
 - f. “Do you think political groups in the United States affected Environmental policy?”
6. Students share their paired answers with the whole class (for the last three questions).
 7. Guided by the teacher, the class works together to put forth a collective hypothesis responding to the question “What impact did Western Environmentalism have upon American deforestation?”

Closing Activity:

- To debrief, the teacher will show sources on America’s current stance on Environmental policy, making sure to point out the throughlines and connections between the class’s prediction and our world today ([Forest History after WWII](#), [PBS Timeline of Modern Environmentalism](#)).
- End class by explaining that deforestation is a global issue that persists to this day.
- Explain the UN Global Goals, making sure to delve deeper into UN Global Goal #15: Life on Land, specifically 15.2, “End Deforestation and Restore Degraded Forests”
- Point out that Deforestation and taking care of the environment is not just a solely North American problem, but also explain that as American citizens we need to think about how we ourselves can do better on a global stage

Post-Assessment:

- An exit activity, which is a brief creative writing prompt:

You are watching a prominent American political figure on a local talk show. When the subject of the Environment comes up, she has this to say:

“These days, young people are drawing so much attention to the environment. When I was younger, all we cared about was which gumball lasted the longest. It seems like it’s merely just a TikTok-related, ‘Gen. Z’ fad to care about the environment, which means this worry is bound to go away soon. This is why we need to forget about the issue– there are other problems facing America that have deeper roots.”

You become so frustrated with said political figure that you decide to write to her.

How do you respond, and what historical precedent do you use to support your response? What do you argue should be her course of action as it relates to American environmental policy instead?

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Reflection: *How are students engaging with ideas from another culture? What does it mean for them?*

Students are engaging with ideas from other cultures when they are learning about Environmentalism from a non-Western culture. For many American students, it is easy to make sweeping claims about what other nations ought to do in order to help the world, while at the same time knowing very little about the specific issue from a different nation's perspective. This lesson plan was created for an American History classroom setting in order to challenge students to not view the world with only an American-centric view, a trap that can be easy to fall into with respect to an American History curriculum. Through examining Chinese policy on deforestation, students are able to get perspectives on the problem of deforestation that they may not have considered before— students are potentially considering the problem that comes with 'less developed' nations needing to remove forests in order to make way for their nation's future industrial innovation. To students, being able to view global issues like deforestation through different global lenses will emphasize the importance of historical context in being able to explain a nation's attitudes towards certain global issues.

Resources:

- [Deforestation in China](#)
- [Worldmapper Treecover/Forests in 2005](#)
- [Slide 20 of Prof. Williams' Slides \(On China's Historical Forest Cover\)](#)
- [Forest History after WWII](#)
- "Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the esthetic harvest it is capable, under science, of contributing to culture." - Aldo Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*
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Extension Activities/Extending the Lesson/Cross-Curricular Connections (2-3 ideas):

- Students can again use the skills of creating a hypothesis about other nations' actions with respect to their policies on deforestation.
 - How does Deforestation look different for nations that are considered to be 'developing' compared to nations that are 'industrialized'?
- Another lesson about American consumerism as a driving factor for environmental degradation.

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- A potential class debate on the questions of:
 - “Does industrial progress always stand in opposition to environmental protection?”
 - “What is an acceptable amount of environmental degradation when it comes to making economic progress?”
 - “Who’s job is it to reduce global deforestation?”
 - Easy to connect to a science curriculum, especially when it comes to environmental degradation and content on Rachel Carson and lethal environmental toxins.
 - If we delve deeper into Rachel Carson’s work, teachers can explain the prominence of pesticides and chemicals in American households of the 60s, and the impacts that they had upon American families.
 - Examples of chemicals that can be referenced:
 - DDT (Found in pesticides. Carson references these a lot)
 - Hydrofluorocarbons (Greenhouse gasses)
 - Freon (A greenhouse gas commonly found in 60s refrigerators)
 - Lead (A toxic chemical in paint)
 - This could connect to the 2013 book *Plutopia* by Kate Brown, which covers two of the world’s first Plutonium production sites, one in America and one in Russia. Throughout the novel, Brown explains the devastating impact that the chemicals had upon the nations’ respective environments.
 - A Lesson centered upon asking “How might the United States uphold the UN global goals? How might it not?”
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Assessment:

- [LO1] Creating a hypothesis about what America’s environmental policy on deforestation may have looked like before and during 1945-1995.
- [LO2] Paired worksheet answers (particularly, the second half of questions).
- [LO2] Class hypothesis answering “What impact did Western Environmentalism have upon American deforestation?”
- [LO2] Exit Ticket

Examples:

What did America’s environmental policy looked like, both before and during 1945-1995?

“If Western Environmentalism wasn’t mainstream, then America likely did not have a policy that considered deforestation to be all that bad. It probably didn’t consider the environment to have value in and of itself very much. If Western Environmentalism started to become more mainstream, then there were probably also more and more laws created in order to protect the environment in America.”

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- How did China view the environment?

“China viewed the environment, especially trees as something that it could use in order to boost the environment with ‘the Great Cuttings’ (Environmental China).”

- Is this view different than Western Environmentalism?

“Western Environmentalism would not think that destroying the environment is a good thing, even if it benefits the environment, because “Forests are the lungs of our land” - FDR.”

- How did China subsequently handle Environmental policy?

“China cut down a lot of trees during the ‘Great Cuttings’ as a part of the three Great Leaps Forward. The Chinese government advocated for this. (Environmental China) Only about 7% of China was left with tree cover (Prof. Williams, Slide 20)”

- What can we learn from how China handled Environmental policy?

“What the government tells us to do shapes how we think about certain things. Also, we all exploit natural resources in order to make money.”

- Do you think we will see parallels to how America handles Environmental policy?

“Yes. America’s environment is also exploited to make money.”

- What similarities or differences do you think might exist between the ways that China and America think about the Environment?

“When China was cutting a lot of trees down the United States was arguing to protect the forest. There were a lot of social movements in the United States that really believed in what Western Environmentalism said. Also, when this happened in China, America had already done a lot of deforestation.”

- Do you think political groups in the United States affected Environmental policy?

“Yes and no. I think that political groups in the United States have been able to lobby for certain protections, but that they still haven’t fixed the whole problem. Americans are still cutting down trees.”

Based on the sources you just explored, what impact did Western Environmentalism have upon American deforestation?

“If America took the ideas of Western Environmentalism seriously, then it changed the way that we viewed our environment and has made us overall more respectful of the environment, even with our laws and the way we think about it.”