

Evaluating Viewpoints

If you have scanned newspaper headlines, you have surely seen environmental issues leap off the front pages: “Endangered Species Stall Development Project,” “Heavy Water Use Threatens Water Supply,” “Anti-Pollution Measures Adopted by Local Industry.” Whether they are large cities, rural areas, or wilderness preserves, all communities struggle with environmental concerns and conflicts. To understand and participate in discussion over solutions to environmental issues, the public must be properly informed. That’s where the media steps in—newspapers and television broadcasts—to provide the public with the information needed to make educated decisions about environmental problems, and to initiate solutions to environmental conflict. It’s an important job, as the media is responsible for providing fair and accurate information on environmental topics to community citizens, lawmakers, scientists, and business owners. In this activity, you will assume the role of newspaper reporter, researching and preparing a headline-grabbing news article on a local or regional environmental issue of your choice. In your article, you will use solid information on your chosen environmental topic to support your proposal of at least one solution to the problem.

OBJECTIVES

Identify a local or regional environmental issue that is currently a focus of written news coverage.

Gather relevant information on your topic from a range of sources, such as newspapers, television, environmental organizations, and state agencies.

Create a written news article that explores all sides of your topic.

MATERIALS

- computers with Internet access
- resource materials on current environmental topics: newspapers, magazines, newsletters from environmental organizations and state agencies dealing with environmental issues (brought from home)

Procedure

1. As a class, discuss environmental issues faced by your local community. Try to come up with as many topics as you can. Use reference materials—newspapers, magazines, and newsletters—to generate potential issues.
2. Have the teacher or a student record the results of the class brainstorming on a categorized list that all students can see. Categories might include water pollution, air pollution, resource depletion, endangered species, etc.

Evaluating Viewpoints *continued*

3. Working in groups of four or five, choose one of the topics that interests the group. Assign tasks to each member of the group.
4. Determine questions you need to ask about your topic to investigate it fully. Review newspaper and magazine articles dealing with your topic, as well as any available state publications or organization newsletters. If possible, conduct Internet searches.
5. Select an appropriate person (or persons) to interview who could provide an “expert opinion” on your topic. Make a list of questions and arrange to speak by phone or in person.
6. As a group, prepare a written article by compiling the material you have collected and the questions you have pursued. Base it on the Analysis and Conclusions questions below. Contribute your article to a class newspaper.

Analysis

1. **Describing Events** Name the categories of environmental issues that your class created.

2. **Describing Events** What issue did your group choose to investigate? Why did you choose that issue?

3. **Classifying** What branches of science do you believe are directly involved in or related to your chosen environmental issue?

4. **Identifying/Recognizing Patterns** List at least three of the questions you created to investigate the topics that shape your environmental issue.

Evaluating Viewpoints *continued*

Conclusions

- 5. Interpreting Information** Give a brief summary of what you learned from reviewing different sources (newspapers, magazines, Internet, etc.): What are the important topics associated with your environmental issue?

- 6. Interpreting Information** What did you learn from the interview? Summarize briefly the perspective of the contact person on your environmental issue.

- 7. Drawing Conclusions** Is this environmental issue a controversial one in your community? Do different members of the community have different opinions of the importance of the issue, or of how it should be resolved? Describe some of these varying opinions and biases toward this issue.

- 8. Drawing Conclusions** As a class, consider all the environmental issues investigated in your community. Do you think that your community faces serious environmental problems? How would you grade your community's approach to dealing with these issues (use the A–F scale) and why?

Evaluating Viewpoints *continued*

9. Applying Conclusions From your investigations, what do you believe is the best approach to resolving your chosen issue? Describe at least one potential solution.

Extension

1. Research and Communications Attend a meeting of a local planning, zoning, or environment board, or a city council meeting that will focus on environmental issues. Take notes on the issues discussed and how the meeting is carried out. Identify the citizens concerned and their perspective on the issues. Choose one of the issues and briefly summarize it here.
