



Connecticut Environmental Justice Screening Tool High School Lesson Plan

Environmental Justice in Connecticut and Beyond
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Introduction

In this section, students learn about environmental justice in Connecticut and other parts of the US, by studying how communities are struggling with environmental inequities, how to use the Connecticut Environmental Justice Mapping Tool, learning how to bring transparency and data to their communities by using the Connecticut Environmental Justice Mapping Tool, and learning how communities have fought for environmental justice. There are four lessons in this section adapted from California Coastal Commission, (California Coastal Commission, 2022) each taking up to one hour:

- **Lesson 1: What is environmental justice?**
 - The objective is for students to learn about how communities struggle with environmental injustices/inequities and what role Connecticut plays through state efforts.
- **Lesson 2: What is environmental racism?**
 - The objective is for students to understand how historical systemic racist policies and practices have disadvantaged people of color (POC), particularly black, in Connecticut and nationwide.
- **Lesson 3: How to use the Connecticut Environmental Justice Screening Tool?**
 - The objective is for students to learn how to use the Screening tool to bring resources to their communities.
- **Lesson 4: How do communities fight for environmental justice?**
 - The objective is for students to learn how communities fight for environmental justice and how to develop environmental justice solutions using the Screening tool and other resources provided.

Student Handouts: Designed for in-person learning. Includes activity worksheets, discussion questions, and exit tickets for each lesson. Download handouts as a [PDF](#).

Teacher Handouts: Designed for in-person learning. Includes anchor charts, model worksheets, and templates to record thoughts and ideas from discussions. Download handouts as a [PDF](#).

These lessons are intended for students who have prior knowledge of concepts of discrimination, forms of racism, and discriminatory practices.

These lessons are adapted from California Coastal Commission and follow the [5E model](#) of inquiry-based learning: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. Each lesson is based on a guiding question that students will attempt to answer throughout the

lesson. The purpose of these guiding questions is to keep students engaged by practicing their critical thinking skills while they develop multiple answers throughout the lesson. Modifications to each lesson plan is encouraged, if needed, to accommodate the learning strategies of your students. For example, in lessons that require watching or listening, videos can be substituted; view the link to see more videos on the [Environmental Justice for Students and Educators page](#). Think about starting each lesson at the “explain” activity to have students focus on core ideas. The “elaborate” and “evaluate” activities can be used as lessons on their own. Additional activities are included as well. See the last page of this packet to view **additional activities**.

Environmental justice is a sensitive topic. Listed below are resources and best practices to help keep the classroom a safe space for learning and discussion about the topic and to ensure respect and productivity for students, from Coastal California Commission:

- “Establish discussion agreements that foster listening, respect, courage, and accountability. Examples include:
 - **Use “I” Statements:** Think of the difference between “We all agree” versus “I agree”, and “No one agrees with you” versus “I disagree”. Using “I” statements helps avoid generalizations and creates a brave discussion space for students.
 - **Intent versus Impact:** Acknowledge your impact, even though it was not your intent. Think of someone accidentally stepping on your foot. While it was not their intent, it had an impact.
 - **Practice “both-and” thinking:** Be open to new ideas and perspectives. Avoid binary, “either-or” thinking.
 - **Take space, make space:** Be aware of how much space you are taking in a discussion. If you are sharing a little or not at all, consider taking up more space. If you are sharing more than others, consider making space for other voices.
 - **Expect and accept lack of closure:** In discussions about difficult topics, there may not always be concrete answers or conclusions.
- Offer sentence starters for students to frame their opinions during group discussions. These are especially helpful for English language learners. Examples include:
 - I think_____ because_____.
 - I agree/disagree with_____ because_____.
 - I see it differently because_____.”



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For additional information about leading healthy classroom discussions, visit [EduTopia](#). For leading classroom discussions about race, see resources from [Teaching Tolerance](#) and the [National Museum of African American History](#).

Environmental Justice in Connecticut and Beyond

Grades 9-12 and ESL

Lesson 1: What is environmental justice?

Objective: for students to learn about how communities struggle with environmental injustices/inequities and what role Connecticut plays through state efforts.

Engage	Students brainstorm synonyms and definitions of the words “environment” and “justice”, and brainstorm what is environmental justice.
Explore	Students listen to a podcast about environmental (in)justices in Connecticut while answering questions and following along with the Bingo activity.
Explain	Students share and discuss their answers with the class.
Elaborate	Students learn the State of Connecticut’s definition of environmental justice.
Evaluate	Students complete an exit ticket.

Engage: (10 minutes) Instruct students to write down what comes to their mind (synonyms and/or definitions) when they think of the words “environment” and “justice”, and where they overlap, through filling out a Venn-diagram (see [student handout](#) page 1). As a class, go around the room and collect students’ answers while recording them on the class anchor chart (see [teacher handout](#) page 1). Introduce guiding question: “What is environmental justice?”

Explore/explain: (20 minutes) In class, play this play this [podcast](#) (Pellico and Shen, 2023) about environmental justice efforts in Connecticut. For time sake, play up to the first 20 minutes. Assign students to answer the following questions about the podcast, record their answers, and fill out their Bingo Board (see [student handout](#) page 3-4).

- What event or problem caused people to start taking action? (Sewage flooding,

storm water runoff, water waste discharge, etc.)

- Who took action? (Community members, parents, activist groups, environmental justice advocates, etc.)
- What was the solution, if any? Who decided on the solution? (Community meetings, listening sessions, the EPA investigated the causes of the sewage back up and sewage systems, no solution, etc.)
- How is the podcast related to the environment? How is it related to justice?
- What is environmental justice?

Explain: (15 minutes) Regroup as a class. Ask students to share their answers to each question. Invite students to respond to their classmates' answers. Have students define their own definition of environmental justice and record it (see [student handout](#) page 4)

Elaborate: (5 minutes) Show students the State of Connecticut's definition of environmental justice (see [teacher handout](#) page 4).

Evaluate: (10 minutes) For students' exit ticket (see [student handout](#) page 5), ask them to answer either of the questions:

- Do you agree with this definition of environmental justice? Why or why not? OR
- What would you add to or change this definition?
- How does Connecticut's state definition of environmental justice compare/contrast to yours?

Environmental Justice in Connecticut and Beyond

Grades 9-12 and ESL

Lesson 2: What is environmental racism?

Objective: for students to understand how historical systemic racist policies and practices have disadvantaged people of color (POC), particularly black, in Connecticut and nationwide.

Engage	Students examine a graphic and answer questions about a Los Angeles pollution study by the United Church of Christ.
Explore	Students learn about historical systemic racism and watch a video about redlining.
Explain	Students reflect on the video by answering discussion questions.
Elaborate	Students discuss the video as a class.
Evaluate	Students complete an exit ticket.

Engage: (10 minutes) “Show students this [picture](#) (Pulido, 2000)_from the United Church of Christ’s study of uncontrolled hazardous waste sites in Los Angeles County in 1987 see [teacher handout](#) page 5). Walk through the map and ask students to record their answers individually (see [student handouts page 6](#)), share with a partner, and/or discuss as a class. Introduce guiding question: What is environmental racism?

- How many uncontrolled toxic waste sites are in zip codes with a Hispanic population greater than 20 percent (gray and light gray areas)?
- How many uncontrolled toxic waste sites are in zip codes with a Hispanic population less than 20 percent (white areas)?

- Why do you think that the companies dumped more toxic waste in these areas instead of others?
- This map is from 1987. Do you think that there are still toxic waste sites in these neighborhoods? Why or why not?" (Section from (California Coastal Commission, 2022))

Open conversation and collect students' answers. Refer to resources on teaching topics about race if needed. If needed and as a class, define; race and how it's different from ethnicity, prejudice and how it's different from racism. Visit [this resource from Racial Equity Tools](#) (Racial Equity Tools, 2020) for definitions.

Explore: (20 minutes) Clarify that groups of people, like governments, industries, and corporations can participate in historical racist actions or have racial bias beliefs, just like individuals. Define institutional racism (Potapchuk et al., 2005), see [teacher handout](#) page 5). Show students a video about segregation, the racial wealth gap, and how historical systemic racist policies and practices have disadvantaged black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in Connecticut and nationwide. If time, play up to the first 20-30 minutes of the video [A History of Environmental Justice and Racial Policies in Connecticut](#) (CT DEEP, 2020b)_by [CT DEEP](#).

Explain: (10 minutes) Have students reflect individually on the video by answering one of the following questions, (see [student handout](#) page 7):

- According to the video, what was the difference in the environmental conditions between wealthy white neighborhoods and low-wealth black/POC neighborhoods?
- How was redlining a form of systemic racism?
- What is something in the video that surprised you? What questions do you still have?

Elaborate: (15 minutes): Discuss students' answers as a class. Explain the impacts of systematic racism and how communities are disadvantaged by burdens and fight for environmental justice. Emphasize that these communities tend to lack resources such as time, information, income, transportation, and political power. If time, have students discuss the following questions:

- Which neighborhoods do you think environmental injustices are more likely: in neighborhoods that were redlined or places that were not? Explain your thinking.
- Why do you think polluting companies and industries choose to put their pollution sites in communities of low-income/low-wealth and of color, and not white and wealthy neighborhoods?
- How is environmental racism related to environmental justice?
- In your opinion, who has the responsibility to fix the lasting negative effects of redlining and other forms of systemic racism?



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Evaluate: (5 minutes) Revisit guiding question: what is environmental racism? Instruct students to name an example of environmental racism (see [student handout](#) page 7), for their exit ticket. If time, ask students to share with the class, and ask their classmates for feedback.

Environmental Justice in Connecticut and Beyond

Grades 9-12 and ESL

Lesson 3: How to use the Connecticut Environmental Justice Screening Tool?

Objective: for students to learn how to use the Screening tool to bring resources to their communities.

Engage	Students watch a video tutorial on how to use the Connecticut Environmental Justice Screening Tool while following the user guide.
Explore	Students partner up to complete the mapping tool activity and explore the utilization of the application for the Connecticut Environmental Justice Screening Tool.
Explain	Students discuss findings amongst themselves and compare results with other groups while answering questions.
Elaborate	Regroup as a class, discuss findings, and answer students' questions, if any.
Evaluate	Students answer question and report to their teacher as an exit ticket.

Engage (15 minutes): As a class have students watch this [video](#) tutorial by UConn CIRCA on how to use the Connecticut Environmental Justice Screening Tool. Play the video from the beginning until 10:40. In lieu of the video, have students follow along with this [user guide](#). The tutorial is available in English. Subtitles only are available in English and Spanish. To access Spanish subtitles, click on the video link above, once on YouTube, click settings icon on video, and click Spanish subtitles.

Explore (20 minutes): Instruct students to partner up in groups of two and use a device (each student should have their own device) to explore the [application \(español\)](#). As they

explore the application, have students complete the mapping tool activity (see [student handout](#) page 8). In the activity, student groups will select an area/neighborhood (one area per group) then each partner pulls three scores from that area (six scores total). Students will record their answers on the activity table.

Explain (10 minutes): Instruct students to discuss findings amongst themselves and compare neighborhood results. Have students answer questions below (see [student handout](#) page 9):

- How do the two neighborhoods you looked at compare to each other when it comes to these scores?
- How do the neighborhoods you looked at compare to the neighborhoods your classmates looked at?
- Were you surprised by any of these results?

Elaborate (10 minutes): Regroup as a class, open a discussion about their findings while recording answers to previous questions on class anchor chart see [teacher handout](#) page 7). Answer students' questions, if any.

Evaluate (5 minutes): Have students answer the following question and report to their teacher as an exit ticket (see [student handout](#) page 10)

- Why do scores vary in different neighborhoods/regions?

Environmental Justice in Connecticut and Beyond

Grades 9-12 and ESL

Lesson 4: How do communities fight for environmental justice?

Objective: for students to learn how communities fight for environmental justice and how to develop environmental justice solutions using the Screening tool and other resources provided.

Engage	Students review examples of environmental injustices from previous lessons.
Explore	Students watch a video about a scholar activist fighting for environmental justice in their community, and answer questions about the video.
Explain	Students list action steps that the activist in the video used to identify environmental burdens in their communities and fight for justice.
Elaborate	Students determine if there was fair treatment of environmentally burdened communities.
Evaluate	Students complete an “exit ticket” by naming one way that communities have fought for environmental justice.

Engage: (10 minutes) Review by asking students to volunteer to share their examples of environmental injustices (see [student handout](#) page 11). Emphasize that communities burdened by environmental injustices (such as communities living near polluting facilities or with high pollution exposure and experiencing social vulnerabilities and health impacts) have often been overlooked by government and institutions. Remind students that the suffrage from disproportionate distribution of toxic waste fell on those communities. Emphasize that these communities have fought against environmental injustices,

predominantly with less access to resources and power. Introduce guiding question: How do communities fight for environmental justice?

Explore: (15 minutes) Explain that communities have used different strategies, methods, and tools to fight and act on corporations creating environmental burdens that cause them harm. Introduce students to a [video](#) (In the Know, 2022), which includes a student activist whose community faced or is facing environmental burdens. As a class, watch the video. As they watch, have students record their answer to the following questions (see [student handout](#) page 11):

- What environmental burden did they face? (Unregulated sewage pollution entering Seaside Beach, incinerators and power plants causing air pollution and resulting in health disparities, vehicular pollution, etc.)
- What actions did they take? (Local volunteer work, community organizing, data collection, created an organization, shared their story on TV or in the news, protested, learned about pollution in their neighborhoods etc.)
- What was the outcome? (The company shut down their power plants, ongoing fight, etc.)

Explain: (5 minutes): Ask students to share their findings with the class. Gather students' answers on class anchor chart see [teacher handout](#) page 8.)

Elaborate: (25 minutes): Restate the definition of environmental justice, and its requirements for fair treatment and meaningful involvement. Ask students to write or draw examples of fair treatment from their school and home lives. Examples are, equal amounts of time for class work, equal amounts of food at school lunches, student body government elections, extracurricular activity involvement, etc. (see [student handout](#) page 12). If time, discuss and create a class list see [teacher handout](#) page 9). Have students discuss and reflect on previous lesson and focus on the high rankings where scores were pulled from. Have them continue using the scores based on the table to brainstorm solutions for the challenges in these areas. (Having meditation centers for areas with high levels of depression, installing air sensors in ozone areas, and cleanup brownfield sites) (see [student handout](#) page 12).

Evaluate: (5 minutes) As an "exit ticket" (see [student handout](#) page 13) instruct students to answer the following: what's one thing you can do to advance environmental justice?

Additional Activities

The following activities can be added or substituted to lessons in this unit and are adapted from the Coastal California Commission. Click [here](#) to view more activities.

- **CalEnviroScreen:** an interactive mapping activity exploring pollution and population indicators in California, and how these factors intersect. See full activity on the Coastal Commission website.
- **Emotion journal:** upon completing each lesson, instruct students to reflect on what they have learned and what emotions came up for them. This is especially recommended for lessons 2 and 3 about environmental justice and environmental racism. Questions to consider:
 - How are you feeling about what we learned about?
 - What emotions come up for you when you think about _____?
- **Idea journal:** Upon completing each lesson, have students brainstorm and write ideas for ways to take action for environmental justice. Have students add ideas to this list throughout the unit. In Lesson 5, students can use ideas from their lists when generating action steps to take for environmental justice.
- **Environmental advocate research project:** Have students find local organizations who advocate for environmental justice in communities experiencing environmental injustices.

Have individual students or groups of students pick one organization, go to their website, examine their social media pages, and read news articles involving these organizations. Instruct students to report on their organization, addressing the following questions:

- Where does this organization work? Which communities does it organize?
- Does this organization work with other groups? Which ones, and why do you think they work together?
- What projects, facilities or infrastructures with environmental burdens has this organization fought against? What environmental burdens do these projects, facilities or infrastructures pose to communities?
- What challenges has this group encountered while fighting for environmental justice?
- Are there other groups who dislike the work that this group is doing? Why do you think this is?
- What victories has this group achieved?

- What defeats has this group experienced, and how did they learn from these experiences?
- What actions or strategies has this group used to fight for environmental justice?”

Glossary

Refer to [this resource from Racial Equity Tools](#) (Racial Equity Tools, 2020) for definitions and CT EJScreen Tool [Glossary](#).

Works Cited

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