

Teacher's Guide: Taking Action for a Clean Environment

Recommended Grade Level: 9-12

Suggested Time: About 1.5 hours completed in the classroom or at home, plus additional time to complete the final assignment

Goals

During this lesson, students will accomplish the following:

- Learn about some of the reasons people take action to create a cleaner environment and protect public health
 - Examine the different tactics activists use to achieve their goals
 - Reflect on the personal characteristics that activists possess
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Overview

Taking Action for a Clean Environment is a student-directed learning experience. However, while students are expected to work through the lesson on their own, teachers should be available to keep the lesson on track, answer questions, and ensure that all learning goals are met.

The following is a summary of the lesson screens:

- Screen 1: Students learn that laws may fail to protect public and environmental health.
- Screen 2: Students read about what activism means, what inspires activists to act, and some of the causes activists adopt.
- Screen 3: Students read about chemicals called pesticides. They watch a video about Rachel Carson, a scientist who took action to publicize the adverse health effects of exposure to DDT. They then describe the action Carson took and explain what her actions accomplished.
- Screen 4: Students learn more about Rachel Carson's legacy as an activist and are introduced to the idea that even students may be environmental and public health activists. They then write down two negative environmental trends they are aware of and suggest what needs to change to reverse these trends.
- Screen 5: Students learn that raising awareness of public health and environmental issues and organizing action are two important functions of activism. They watch a video about Erica, a 16-year-old who helped educate and organize her community to oppose construction of a natural gas facility. They then write down two to three sentences to explain Erica's concerns over the proposed project and how she shared these concerns with others.
- Screen 6: Students learn about some of the tactics—the means by which a strategy is carried out—that activists use to help bring about change. They then focus on lobbying, a tactic activists use to try to influence how elected officials vote

on certain legislation. They watch a video about Shadia, a youth activist who helped convince lawmakers to fund the cleanup of a toxic waste site near her home.

Screen 7: Students learn that activists can take the lead at the community level to influence public policy. They watch a video about Misra, an 18-year-old who spurred New York City authorities to improve public transportation to an urban community park. Students then describe the tactics she used and explain why they think the tactics worked.

Screen 8: Students learn why forming a partnership with government or a business might help an activist's ideas reach a wider audience. They watch a video about Andrew, a college student who designed a way to convert vegetable oil into a less-polluting fuel for buses and other vehicles. They then describe how Andrew turned his small class project into something much larger and far reaching.

Screen 9: Students read about consumer activism and the power consumers have to change the way products are made, advertised, and sold. They watch part of a video about a high school student named Jessica, who leads a youth coalition that engages with consumers to change how certain cosmetics are made. Students write down reasons why corporations and government officials would respond to consumer activists, and then watch the rest of the video to learn how Jessica and her group successfully lobbied state officials to pass protective legislation.

Screen 10: Students learn that activists are using technology, including blogs and social media, to achieve their goals. They watch a video about Marisol, a teenager from Chicago, who uses Google Maps as a means by which to spread awareness about the pollution generated by a coal plant in her community. Students then describe ways in which they might have used technology—or heard of it being used—to organize a public event.

Screen 11: Students read about some of the personal characteristics that activists typically possess. Students then write down which characteristics they recognize in the student activists featured in the videos, as well as those they see in themselves.

Final

Assignment: Based on what they've learned during the lesson and their notes, students select one of two assignments to complete. One assignment asks them to be an activist by developing and executing a plan to address an issue that affects the health of their community and/or its environment. The other assignment asks them to interview or write a profile of an activist in their community and then share highlights with the class.

You may consider having students complete the assignment in pairs or small groups. You may also want to clearly define for students your expectations for the work they are to complete. For example, you might decide that planning a campaign is sufficient. Or, you might think of a way to scale the execution of a plan according to the time available.

Before the Lesson

- ❑ Review the lesson to determine where it can best fit into your environmental public health unit.
- ❑ Go through each screen of the lesson, including all of the videos, so that you can familiarize yourself with what students will be doing. As you go through each screen, jot down your own expectations for students' responses.
- ❑ Arrange computers with Internet access so students can work individually or in pairs. It may be necessary to have students complete this lesson at home or in a computer lab outside of class.
- ❑ Before students begin, suggest a timeline for completing the lesson, mention the types of media they will encounter, and let them know how you expect them to submit their work. You may want to provide an outline of this information on a chart, chalkboard, or whiteboard, or as a handout..

Lesson Assessments

The following are descriptions of the lesson features that will be part of the packet of materials that students will submit. Students will use the packet for reference when writing their final assignment. It also allows you to monitor students' work as they're progressing through the lesson.

- **Notes** - Students take notes on screens 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11. If time allows, review their notes before they begin their writing assignment.
- **Final Assignment** - Students complete one final writing assignment. You can have students make their own selection, or assign one according to your goals for the lesson.

Lesson Aids and Extensions

Use the following suggestions to help students if they are stuck on a particular screen, to prepare students for completing their writing assignments, or as follow-up discussions to reinforce learning.

- **Watching Videos** - Encourage students to watch the videos more than once. If you are completing the lesson as a classroom activity, after initially viewing a video, provide students with a specific content focus to frame their next viewing(s). This will help them draw connections between the main topic and the information that the video has to offer.
- **Answering Questions** - Before students view the videos or use the interactive, encourage them to read any questions they will be expected to answer, so that they can watch or play with the questions in mind.