



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
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Toxic, Persistent Chemicals in Human Environments: Case Studies of Agent Orange Use in Vietnam, 1965-1970 and Methyl Mercury in Minamata Bay, Japan, 1932-1968

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Allied bombs destroyed much of the manufacturing capabilities in post war Japan. Industries without war applications were spared. So the importance of those industries was critical to the rebuilding of the Japanese economy. This importance exaggerated the value of the companies and caused the government to overlook dubious practices and, in effect, side with the companies when issues pitted them against the citizenry.

The deep jungles of Vietnam helped the North Vietnamese Army conceal their actions during the Vietnam-American War. The American strategy of defoliating the forests was considered an effective way to overcome that problem. The U.S. military's need to help their troops blurred their understanding of the consequences of their tactics.

Teaching this unit will accomplish three elements in students' education. First, students will complete lessons directly related to specific state standards. Second, they will conduct and present research on environmental contamination about how citizens are affected by the contamination and how they cope, or deal, with the contamination incident. Finally, students will learn how to look at situations that are frequently considered in only emotional terms, in more objective fashion - considering specific risk analysis issues in historical and cultural contexts and from the principals' political and moral perspectives.

Key activities include: Research for debate, creating a faux news program informing the audience about relevant issues, and experimenting with models of bioaccumulation and chemical persistence.

(Recommended for Elementary Science and Social Studies, grade 5)

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