



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2023 Volume IV: Environmental Justice

Plastic, Plastic Everywhere

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In this unit, students will learn the cycle of plastic production and lack of proper disposal in the United States and globally. Students will understand that humans take materials from the Earth to create plastic. Then they dump the plastic back into the environment. The essential question for students to answer throughout the unit will be: Where does our trash go? Students will be challenged to think about the environmental and sociological impacts of the plastic pollution generated in wealthy nations and how they impact lower income and poorer nations.

The content will be organized into three sections: 1) How plastic is created 2) Where does plastic go 3) What are the solutions. Plastic use is emersed into daily life. Individually, people are reliant upon plastic for a range of items such as food packaging, plastic straws, water bottles, food containers, and plastic shopping bags. Plastic production and use are interconnected worldwide. Plastic is produced in the United States and exported to other countries. The US also imports plastic from other countries. Students will learn how pervasive plastic is in everyday life, the range of plastic products, and the global connectiveness of plastic production, distribution, and use.

(Developed for English Language Arts and Social Studies, grade 5; recommended for Elementary Science, grades 4-5, and Science and World Geography, grades 6-7)

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