



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2024 Volume I: Landscape, Art, and Ecology

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## **Landscape Keeps Score: Empire, Waste, Deep Time, and Art**

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by Amanda McMahon

Plastic won't degrade for centuries; nuclear waste will remain dangerous for millennia. But what does a millennium mean? Beyond human life span, it seems beyond understanding. This unit seeks to contextualize the scale of the problem to better communicate to students how the Anthropocene threatens us and our future.

First, students will study the past by reflecting on the rise and (climate-change fueled) fall of Cahokia, a pre-Columbian metropolis. Then, students will explore the present by learning about how plastic can be re-contextualized by re-using it to create artwork. Finally, students will look to the future by learning about the hurdles in creating a nuclear waste warning that will last ten thousand years. Students will take on the design challenge, creating their own model and justifying the design using art historical analogues.

Through this exploration, students will understand how history impacts their world today, and how their choices today will impact their community's future

(Developed for Art 1 and 2, grades 9-12; recommended for Art 1-4, grades 9-12)

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