



#EARTHDAYLIVE Lesson Plan 1

[Earth Day 1970 to #EarthDayLive2020—50 Years & A New Era](#) (6:05 minutes)

GRADES: 6 and up

TIME: 30-60 minutes to several days or more

SUBJECT AREAS: Art, Health, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies/History

PURPOSE: To explore advances, gaps, and backslides of the environmental and climate justice movements since the first Earth Day was held 50 years ago on April 22, 1970 and to invite students to engage in [Earth Day Live 2020](#) and other initiatives that will give them opportunities to help envision and create a just, sustainable future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTENT IN THE VIDEO:

KEYWORDS/KEY TERMS/KEY HISTORICAL REFERENCES:

- **environmental racism**—The disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color
- **classism**—Prejudice against or in favor of people belonging to a particular social class
- **farmworkers movement**—Through nonviolent tactics such as boycotts, pickets, and strikes, the [United Farm Workers \(UFW\)](#) brought the struggles of **farm workers** out of the fields and into cities and towns across the country. This **movement of farm workers** organizing for better pay and safer working conditions has continued to grow since 1962.
- **frontline communities**—Communities that experience “first and worst” the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation
- **Vietnam War protests**—The [anti-war movement](#) began mostly on college campuses, as members of the leftist organization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) began organizing “teach-ins” to express their opposition to the way in which it was being conducted.
- **Civil Rights Movement**—The [civil rights movement](#) was a struggle by African Americans in the mid-1950s to late 1960s to achieve [Civil Rights](#) equal to those of whites, including equal opportunity in employment, housing, and education, as well as the right to vote, the right of equal access to public facilities, and the right to be free of racial discrimination.

- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**—The [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) is an independent executive agency of the United States federal government established in December of 1970 to protect people and our environment.
- **Clean Air Act**—The [Clean Air Act \(CAA\)](#) is the comprehensive federal law that regulates air emissions from stationary and mobile sources.
- **Clean Water Act**—The [Clean Water Act \(CWA\)](#) establishes the basic structure for regulating discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States and regulating quality standards for surface waters.
- **Endangered Species Act**—When Congress passed the [Endangered Species Act \(ESA\)](#) in 1973, it recognized that our rich natural heritage is of "esthetic, ecological, educational, recreational, and scientific value to our Nation and its people." It further expressed concern that many of our nation's native plants and animals were in danger of becoming extinct.

VIDEO REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Compare Earth Day 1970 to today's climate and environmental justice movement. What are the similarities and differences?
2. Why was the farmworkers movement so important for the early days of the environmental justice movement?
3. How has Earth Day and the subsequent environmental movement led to different legislation etc.?
4. In his speech Sen. Nelson describes the environment as: *"...all of America and its problems. It is rats in the ghetto. It is a hungry child in a land of affluence. It is housing that is not worthy of the name; neighborhoods not fit to inhabit."* Why did Earth Day planners hope to build a diverse coalition including people of different ethnicities, income levels, employment sectors, etc.? What types of things might have affected who was able to/interested in participating? How did the fact that most participants were white, middle class young people affect perceptions of the day and the environmental movement?
5. Why do you think #EarthDayLive2020 organizers hope to center the voices of indigenous and frontline communities? Do you think this is important? Why or why not?

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

6. Why should Earth Day matter to youth?
7. What does environmental justice mean to you?
8. What environmental problems do you see or know about in your community?
9. What is your school and/or community doing to address environmental problems and climate change?
10. Do you think your school and/or community could be doing more to address environmental problems and climate change? If so, what else would you like to see happen?
11. How do you see yourself in the environmental and climate justice movement? Is this movement relevant to you? Why or why not?

EARTH DAY LIVE ACTIVISM ACTIVITIES:

- Sign up for [EarthDayLive](#) & help spread the word!
- Sign up to speak or join an open mic as part of a local or regional [EarthDayLive](#) event and/or ask one of your teachers if you can have a few minutes during a digital class to share about why Earth Day matters to you.
- Do a TikTok to help get the word out about [EarthDayLive](#)
- Make a sign about why this matters to you. Share it on social media with the hashtags #EarthDayLive, #DigitalStrike, and #StrikeWithUs, post it to [Save Our Shores' #EarthDayLive Sign Gallery](#), and post the paper version in your window or yard.
- Ask your student government, PTA, teachers union, and/or school board to pass a Climate Emergency Resolution. Learn how and download sample resolutions at [Schools for Climate Action](#).
- Help your school transition to 100% Clean Energy. Download the [Sierra Club's 100% Clean Energy School District Organizing Handbook and Toolkit](#).
- Help your school to reduce plastic consumption. Join the [Plastic Pollution Coalition's Plastic Free Schools Project](#).
- Plan a digital teach-in that will bring your community together to learn and build capacity to advocate for a cleaner, more secure future. Learn how: [Earth Day Network's 2020 Teach-In Toolkit](#)
- Learn more! Sign up for [FREE virtual conferences, events, and a digital environmental film festival at EarthX2020](#).
- What's your vision for the future? Explore possibilities in [The Green New Deal: Bioneers Media Collection](#) and [The Years Project: We Can Solve This](#).

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

- Research one of the movements or legislations mentioned in the video and write up how this impacted water or people or etc.
- Research one environmental legislation change taking place during the coronavirus crisis, within the last few years, or within the past decade and how it is/has/will impact(ing)(ed) our climate and/or a particular community or communities.

TRANSCRIPT WITH LINKS:

Earth Day 1970 to #EarthDayLive2020 — 50 Years & A New Era

Like now, the years leading up to the [first Earth Day on April 22, 1970](#)¹ were complex, challenging times.

Many youth were protesting the injustices of the [Vietnam War](#)².

Others were fighting for [Civil Rights](#)³

Meanwhile, [California farm workers](#)⁴ were fighting for union contracts, higher pay, and better work conditions.

Few were thinking about the health of the planet.

This view of [Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans](#) shows nature in America before pollution was regulated⁵.

Trash and [old tires on the Shore of Baltimore Harbor](#)...

[Illegal Dumping Area](#) off the New Jersey Turnpike...

A 1969 oil spill⁵ led [Sen. Gaylord Nelson \(D-WI\)](#)⁶ to think of a national teach-in day promoting environmental action.

To gain support, Sen. Nelson invited Republican [Congressman Pete McCloskey](#)⁷ to serve as his co-chair.

He then recruited [25-year-old Denis Hayes](#)⁸ as national coordinator. Hayes built a national staff of 85 to promote events across the land.

To build a movement in defense of our planet, they worked to [unite Republicans & Democrats, rich & poor, urban dwellers & farmers, business & labor leaders](#)⁹.

On April 22, 1970 [20 million Americans \(10% of the U.S.\)](#) rallied raising public awareness about the deterioration of our environment and corporate pollution of air and water¹⁰.

Sen. Nelson speaking on the first Earth Day¹¹ ([Sen. Gaylord Nelson's Denver speech notes](#)—This excerpt begins in the middle of the page.)

CBS News coverage of Earth Day 1970¹² ([Full transcript](#)—This clip begins on page 15.)

Although planners' goals to bridge divides by drawing diverse crowds largely failed with [mostly white middle class youth participating in Earth Day actions](#)...¹³

Earth Day 1970 marked the beginning of the [modern environmental movement](#)¹⁴ — leading to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); and the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Endangered Species Acts.¹⁴

Sadly, many of the environmental wins inspired by the original Earth Day have been [rolled back, diluted, and dismantled](#) by the current U.S. Administration.¹⁵

And as the nation worries about coronavirus, [air and water pollution standards are being suspended, science is being ignored, and people are becoming more vulnerable](#).¹⁶

Behind the veil of the pandemic, the EPA is allowing industries like Louisiana's "cancer alley" petrochemical giants to [regulate themselves](#).¹⁷

Meanwhile, mainly low-income communities of color in places like "cancer alley" — where people suffer from high rates of disease and compromised immune systems — [may be hit especially hard by the COVID-19 outbreak](#).¹⁸

The youth leaders planning #EarthDayLive2020 know that [environmental racism and classism harm people, animals, and the planet](#).¹⁹

#EarthDayLive2020 will prioritize the voices of [indigenous leaders and frontline communities](#) to ensure we learn from those whose experience and wisdom is needed to inspire meaningful change.²⁰

"When you quiet worries and the fears, moments like this really urge us to become strong, innovative, holistic-minded, and resilient peoples."—[JADE BEGAY, creative director of NDN Collective](#)²¹

Together, we can transform our world into one that is safe, sustainable, and able to flourish for generations to come.

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2. History.com Editors. "Vietnam War Protests." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 22 Feb. 2010, www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-protests.
3. "Civil Rights Movement." *The Free Dictionary*, Farlex, legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Civil+Rights+Movement.
4. Admin. "UFW History." *UFW*, ufw.org/research/history/ufw-history/.
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6. "[Meet Gaylord Nelson, Founder of Earth Day](#)." *Nelsonearthday.net*.
7. Cohan, Ellen. "[Pete McCloskey](#)." *Climate One*, 5 Aug. 2015.
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10. "The History of Earth Day." *Earth Day*, www.earthday.org/history/.
11. Nelson, Gaylord. "Partial Text for Senator Gaylord Nelson, Denver, Colorado Earth Day 1970 Speech." *Nelson Earth Day*, www.nelsonearthday.net/.

12. [CBS News coverage of Earth Day 1970](#)¹² ([Full transcript](#)—This clip begins on page 15.)
13. [CBS News coverage of Earth Day 1970 in Albuquerque, NM](#) ([Full transcript](#)—This clip begins on page 15.)
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19. Visit strikewithus.org and scroll down to view the description of Day 1/April 22
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21. Begay, Jade. “Community Care: An Indigenous Response to Coronavirus.” *Yes! Magazine*, 30 Mar. 2020, www.yesmagazine.org/opinion/2020/03/30/coronavirus-indigenous-community-care/.
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“[1969 Oil Spill Near Santa Barbara Was Galvanizing for Environmentalism](#).” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, 11 June 2015,

PHOTO & VIDEO CREDITS (by slide number):

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2. Getty Images stock video from Animoto
3. Vietnam War protest <https://www.history.com/news/cia-surveillance-operation-chaos-60s-protest>
4. John Lewis (foreground) is beaten by a state trooper in Selma, Alabama, on March 7, 1965. The future congressman suffered a fractured skull. | [AP Photo](#)

5. Grape strike, Delano, California, Sept. 24, 1965 Harvey Wilson Richards. Harvey Richards Media Archive
6. Video footage by Chris Renfer of Critical Reels, Alekz Londos of Advanced Disaster Relief, and Save Our Shores
7. New Orleans, Lake Pontchartrain. [John Messina / EPA](#)
8. Trash and old tires on the Shore of Baltimore Harbor. [Jim Pickerell / EPA](#)
9. Illegal Dumping Area off the New Jersey Turnpike. [Gary Miller / EPA](#)
10. Sand Covers Abandoned Car on Beach at Breezy Point South of Jamaica Bay 05/1973, [U.S. National Archives' Local Identifier: 412-DA-5436](#)
11. [Workmen in small boats gather oil-soaked hay from the water in Santa Barbara, Calif.](#), on Feb. 8, 1969. Officials announced they had finally capped an underwater oil well which had been leaking oil into the ocean for 12 days, fouling harbors and beaches. AP
Inset photo: [Gaylord Nelson speaking on the first Earth Day celebration in 1970.](#)
12. Getty Images stock photo from Animoto
13. Republican [Congressman Pete McCloskey](#)
14. 25-year-old Denis Hayes, 1970 national coordinator, <https://www.earthday.org/history/>
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16. Thousands of Earth Day protesters walk along a closed street in Philadelphia. ([Bettman / Getty Images](#))
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