

Seeing Through Water: The Impact of Our Decisions

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Abstract

Seeing Through Water is a unit developed to bring awareness of climate change to eighth-grade middle school students in the English Language Arts classroom. The topic of water was selected because of the interdisciplinary connections and cross-curricular standards relevant for the middle school level. Students are asked to justify how the actions of others impact the decisions they make. Presented with accurate information, students make connections to their lives, become climate literate, and learn to take appropriate, thoughtful actions.

Keywords

[biodiversity](#), [climate literacy](#), [climate change](#), [collective action](#), [sustainability](#), [youth climate activism](#), [multimodal texts](#)

Overview

This unit came from a desire to engage students in understanding [climate change](#) in an accessible and meaningful way. Water became the focus of this planning when it became clear that water quality was impacting students, families, and community members in the school district. This topic also meant understanding the context of the community surrounding students and how that impacts students' perspectives coming into the conversation. In a district that is heavily influenced by the prominence of agriculture and political views that challenge the urgency of climate change, it was important to find ways to bring students into the conversation through personal connections and layering of texts.

The intention of this unit is that students understand the ways [water impacts everybody](#), starting with themselves. Beginning with a variety of multimodal texts, I provide space for students to understand how water impacts all people and how our decisions impact water quality. After discussing the background texts, students engage with the novel [Memory of Water](#) by Finnish author Emmi Itäranta. As students finish the course texts, they move into a [participatory action research project](#) where they consider the water quality in their own community and engage in ways to bring their new understanding to their classmates, families, and school.

Narrative Framing

Set in the postapocalyptic future Scandinavia, *Memory of Water* is a dystopian story of a tea master who holds the knowledge of where water exists. As the protagonist Noria learns more about this role, she decides how to do the right thing as it impacts her community. Used with a collection of other multimodal texts, the novel provides a framing for students to consider the impact we all have on our water and how we can make choices to move toward safer water for all.

At a Glance

Title	<i>Seeing Through Water: The Impact of Our Decisions</i>
Unit Time	3-4 weeks
Grade Level(s)	7-8 th grade
Core Text	<i>Memory of Water</i> , by Emmi Itäranta
Supporting Texts	<i>We Are Water Protectors</i> by Carole Lindstrom <i>The Fate of Fausto</i> by Oliver Jeffers Short Stories: “Skywoman”; “Lamentations” <i>Frozen 2</i> : “When I Am Older (Earth, Wind, Fire, Water)” <i>Moana</i> <i>Dream</i> <i>LN3: Seven Teachings of Anishinaabe in Resistance</i>
Climate Literacy Terms	Biodiversity Climate literacy Climate change Collective action Indigenous environmental practices Planetarianism Sustainability Youth Climate Activism
Objectives	Students will evaluate and justify how the actions of others impact the decisions we make (right or wrong).
Materials and Resources	Unit guide

Going Forward

Several questions will occur as students move forward with this unit. The first one is how we can build on this unit going forward. Although I do not have answers yet, I envision this unit growing to include several STEM opportunities, connect to the art and music classes, get out into nature in our community, and function as a community outreach occasion from the youth perspective.

References

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