

Debate – Environment Vs Resources Post-Visit Activity

Grades: 8 to 12

Subject: Natural Resources, Environmental Studies

The BC Ministry of Education's 2007 Environmental Learning & Experience Guidelines champions critical reflection and negotiation as an important means of empowering students to become more environmentally responsible, encouraging them to assess different viewpoints and perspectives.

The story of the Britannia Mines offers a unique opportunity for your students to debate and defend two opposing and equally valid perspectives. On the one hand, mines have answered our need for natural resources, allowing society to progress and advance. Yet on the other hand, the environmental legacies historically left behind, stemming from a time when environmental regulations were limited, have led to pollution of water courses, soils and the suffering of local ecologies. The history of the Britannia Mines gives a local case study in which to debate these issues – it was a successful mine, at one time producing 17% of the world's copper (one of our most useful metals), but leaving behind a pollution problem detrimental to the local waters and marine ecology. Thankfully the remediation of the mine has since removed the environmental issue and is allowing the area to begin to return to its former state. This activity encourages the students to research and debate these issues.

Resources

The following links may help in their research:

Mineral Resources Program of BC

International Council on Mining & Metals

Canadian Biological Information Network

Natural Resources Canada

Mineral Information Institute

Towards Sustainable Mining

Activity Suggestion

Split the class into two debating teams. Either you or your students can choose which perspective they will argue the case for. You may choose to assign research tasks to help break down the information, as listed against each perspective.

Perspective R – society's need for metals and other non-renewable resources outweighs the localized environmental damage that may occur through the mine's life, especially when the area can be remediated afterwards.

Research breakdown: uses of minerals, advancement of society, energy consumption, modern mine reclamation, case studies, technological advances

Perspective E – if we are to have a sustainable world and future, the environmental impact of an area should take the top priority when a mine is proposed and if the environmental damage is likely to be great, the mine should not be allowed to proceed.

Research breakdown: impacts on marine life, impacts on groundwater, impacts on food chain, case studies, technological advances

Give your students time to research their perspective, using a variety of sources such as the library and internet. Encourage them to assess or gauge validity in their sources, e.g. bias, hearsay or outdated material. Follow classroom debating guidelines, giving students adequate time afterwards to reflect and develop their own informed opinions.