

I N T R O D U C T I O N

to

CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In today's turbulent and changing world, people are grappling with a host of serious and complex environmental issues resulting from humanity's decisions, actions and consequential impact on the world's natural resources. Debate on environmental issues—over their origin, extent, degree of severity, and means of resolution—continues to intensify among scientists, activists, politicians, business leaders, and citizens.

The North Carolina Envirothon, through its Current Environmental Issues component, provides middle and high school students the opportunity to explore the most urgent and controversial issues facing North Carolinians today. Many of these issues are the same issues being studied and publicly debated across the country and the world.

To improve issue awareness, analysis and critical thinking skills, each year Envirothon students are assigned a variety of articles and editorials written by individuals, academia, environmental organizations, business and industry, conservation agencies, the Internet, and the general media from three main subject areas:

CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES PERTINENT TO NORTH CAROLINA AND THE WORLD

- Earth's Natural Resources - soil, water, air, plants and animals
- Issues At Home and the World Over - global climate change, biodiversity, endangered species, exotic species, habitat
- Our Global Family – people, population growth, resource consumption
- Annual Issue - as selected by the International Canon Envirothon each year

The purpose of these readings is twofold: 1) to introduce students to the science behind the issues and their social, economic, political and ecological implications; and 2) to expose them to opposing viewpoints to stimulate thinking and to help them better understand the public debate on a variety of North Carolina and global issues. While students are tested on their reading comprehension of each article's content, they are encouraged to draw their own conclusions and form their own informed opinions with sound justification. The NC Envirothon State Steering Committee strives to provide a balance of perspectives. The opinions presented are not necessarily those of the NC Envirothon State Steering Committee or the NC Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

CRITICAL THINKING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION ON CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

- Analysis of "Credible" Information Sources (Accuracy, Authority, Objectivity & Currency)
- Identification of Facts, Opinions, and Opinions-Stated-As-Facts
- Listening and Respecting Different Points of View
- Values Clarification and Environmental Ethics
- Conflict Resolution through Compromise, Consensus and Collaboration

The purpose of these readings is threefold: 1) to provide students information on how to look critically at information sources; 2) to better understand the rationale behind an individual's decisions and the motivations for his/her actions; and 3) to illustrate ways in which issues are resolved. While students are tested on their reading comprehension of each article's content, they are encouraged to examine their personal values system and their own skills for conflict resolution.

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS AND EXEMPLARY ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Through autobiographies, biographies and written excerpts, students are introduced to individuals who are admired and respected for their qualities and achievements in expressing their environmental concern and changing the way society perceives and acts toward the natural world. While students are tested on their reading comprehension of each leader's background and contribution to conservation and environmental action, they may be inspired to make a difference themselves as environmental stewards and role models. The NC Envirothon State Steering Committee strives to provide a diversity of environmental leaders regarding gender, environmental concern and perspective, and historical time period.