The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects. Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom. In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

Core Skill Sets:
These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at www.WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/.

KEY TERMS

**World Water Day**—An annual event celebrated on March 22, the day focuses attention on the importance of water conversation and sustainable management.

**Great Pacific Garbage Patch**—A collection of marine debris and garbage in the North Pacific Ocean (also known as the Pacific trash vortex). The Great Pacific Garbage Patch spans waters from the West Coast of North America to Japan and is twice the size of Texas. The debris in the patch accumulates because the vast majority is not biodegradable.

**Water conservation**—Refers to all policies, strategies and tactics to sustainably manage water, to protect it as a natural resource, protect the environment, and meet current and future human demands.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- While three per cent of the world’s water is fresh water, less than one per cent of the Earth’s water is available for drinking, sanitation and freshwater species. ([National Geographic](https://www.nationalgeographic.com))
- 1.1 billion people worldwide lack access to water and 2.7 billion people find water scarce for at least one month a year. ([World Wildlife Fund](https://www.worldwildlife.org))
- The greatest causes of stress on the world’s water systems are pollution, agriculture (which uses 70 per cent of the world’s accessible freshwater) and population growth. ([World Wildlife Fund](https://www.worldwildlife.org))
- As climate change continues unabated, patterns of weather and water will change around the world with droughts becoming more common and severe in some places and floods in others. The overall impact will be added stress on the world’s water systems, with less available for farming, cities, energy generation and ecosystems. ([World Wildlife Fund](https://www.worldwildlife.org))
- Canada has 20 per cent of the planet’s fresh water – but only seven per cent of the planet’s renewable water; meaning, the rest is retained in lakes, underground aquifers and glaciers. ([Government of Canada](https://www.canada.ca))
- The majority of freshwater in Canada drains northward towards the Arctic Ocean and Hudson Bay while 85 per cent of Canadians live along the southern border; the water supply in the country, while abundant, is still over taxed. ([Government of Canada](https://www.canada.ca))
- Canadians use an average of 329 litres of water a day, second only to the United States and twice as much as the European average ([National Post](https://www.nationalpost.com))
- Thousands of Indigenous people in over 50 communities are under “water advisories,” meaning they do not have access to clean drinking water. ([Human Rights Watch](https://www.humanrightswatch.org))
- Many of these advisories have been in places for years, if not decades, despite the availability of technological and infrastructure solutions. ([CBC](https://www.cbc.ca))
- Plastic doesn’t biodegrade (meaning it doesn’t break down naturally as an apple in compost does). It simply breaks into smaller and smaller parts. The majority of it ends up in landfills or the ocean, where there’s an estimated 100 million tons of plastic debris threatening the health and safety of marine life. ([Columbia University](https://www.columbia.edu))
- Global plastic consumption rates have gone from 5.5 million tons in the 1950s to 110 million tons in 2010. ([Columbia University](https://www.columbia.edu))
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

• **Themes:** Water, Human rights, Local issues, Poverty, Socially conscious living
• **Course Connections:** English, Canadian and World Studies

MATERIALS

• Front board
• Paper and writing utensils
• Computer/tablet with Internet access and video capability

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:
• Explore the global water crisis and its impact locally, nationally and globally
• Reflect on the hidden water price tag
• Explore the concept of water ownership and rights

DISCUSS

1. Why is water considered a life source?
2. What is the connection between poverty, economic health, physical health and water quality and accessibility?
3. Who is responsible for protecting water?
4. What is the “hidden price tag” of water?
5. How can you change your lifestyle to reduce your own consumption of water?

MAPPING IT

Using the world map geology.com/world/world-map.shtml, ask students to rate the continents of the world based on their assumption of water quality and accessibility (1 – low and 5 – high). Ask students: Which countries do you think is most affected by the water crisis? What would you rate Canada’s water quality? Why?

DIVE DEEPER

Show students “Water Crisis–a short introduction” www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyzvcrZluf0 (3:29). In small groups, ask students to think about their personal water usage per day. Distribute chart paper and markers. Have them log their daily water usage on a timeline. Are students aware of the current water crisis? Does their daily water usage take into consideration the need to conserve water?

As a class, read the Global Voices “Beyond World Water Day” article and discuss the questions in the “Discuss” section. Ask students, in response to reading the article, what should you add to your timeline of daily water consumption that you had not thought of previously?

Ask students to think about the hidden water price tag. Every item that they consume (eat, drink, wear, use) requires water to be manufactured. In small groups, ask students to list six items that they consume on a regular basis. What is the hidden water price tag on these items? Using the internet, research the total hidden water price tag.

For example:
Beef—14000 litres
Chicken—4000 litres
500 sheets of paper—5000 litres
T-shirt—713 litres

Show students “Canada’s Water Crisis: Indigenous Families at Risk” www.youtube.com/watch?v=Arnqpm70Ng (4:30). Ask students: Did you know about the water crisis in Canada? Were you surprised? As a class, discuss strategies to raise awareness about the national water crisis. Why is it important to ensure that all people have access to safe and accessible water?

Ask students to explore the concept of water as a product. Whose responsibility is it to protect and maintain the quality of water sources locally, nationally and globally? Is water a human right or is it a product that should be owned and sold for profit?

As a class, debate the question “Is water a product or a right?” Split the class into two groups and allocate each group a side. Allow time for students to research and prepare for the debate. Hold the debate. Debrief the arguments as a class. What is the class’ consensus—is water a right or a product?

Show students “Miguel Vargas’ Fight for Clean Water” www.youtube.com/embed/q_20QJ_ff5A (2:12) to consider the affect of water when it isn’t treated as a right. Poll the class again. Did anyone change their response?

RESOURCES

World Water Day www.worldwaterday.org/

WE Villages, Water Pillar www.we.org/we-villages/water/

WE Walk for Water campaign www.we.org/we-schools/program/campaigns/we-walk-for-water/