

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Conservation and Preservation</u>	95
Overview	95
Activity	96
TEKS	98
Sources	103
<u>LBJ’s Government Organization and Task Force Solution</u>	104
Overview	104
Activity	105
TEKS	112
Sources	119
<u>Agricultural Conservation</u>	120
Overview	120
The War on Poverty and the Great Society	121
National Forests, Grasslands, and the Wilderness Act	122
Activity	123
TEKS	128
Sources	134
<u>The Urban Environment and Civil Rights</u>	136
Overview	136
Activity and Additional Resources	137
TEKS	140
Sources	151

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

Connecting Civil Rights to Environmental Justice

Overview Providing Context to Educator

Lyndon Johnson, a southern politician that voted against civil rights policies for twenty years, seemed an unlikely ally for minority populations. Then, in 1957 he voted in favor of the first civil rights bill passed since reconstruction. As president, Johnson consistently presented a united front with civil rights advocates reminding Congress, in multiple speeches, of their duty to serve all Americans by legislating against segregation, protecting voting rights, and ensuring equal opportunities in housing, education, and access to nature. LBJ strongly believed that government should respond to the needs of the people, a philosophy forming the foundation of his Great Society mandate. (Vantage Point, 343 & 345)

The minority groups President Johnson cared for so deeply often carried the burden of environmental degradation as they were the primary inhabitants of deteriorating urban centers suffering from industrial pollution. The connection between environmental injustice to pollution affecting communities of color was made clear when Dr. Robert Bullard published his late 1970s research on Houston, Texas’ sanitation crisis. (DrRobertBullard.com) Prior to the connection between civil rights and environmental injustice the Johnson administration addressed urban issues by initiating air and water pollution legislation, created a model cities plan, implemented a plan for mass transportation, and committed to expand natural areas in urban centers.

Cities faced financial difficulties during the 1960s without government interference as their tax base dwindled due to white flight to the suburbs. Minority groups left behind suffered the consequences of unregulated industry and lack of representation to advocate on their behalf. The environmental justice movement defined by the Environmental Protection Agency as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” (EPA.gov) This grass roots community-based movement creatively cited the 1964 Civil Rights Act in their complaints against industrial pollution. Advocates argue that cities purposefully allowed polluters access to communities of color, a recognizable trend verified by multiple studies. The environmental Protection Agency credits people of color with starting this long-lasting movement as a way to address environmental issues in their communities.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

Activity: This activity is from Teaching Tolerance, a free educator resource guide for teaching inclusion and social justice.

Grades 3-5

Interviewing a Classmate

Essential Questions:

- What do I already know about my classmate?
- What do I want to know about my classmate?

Have students write down open-ended questions. Set the expectation that answering questions is optional, especially if they feel the question is too personal or they feel uncomfortable.

Provide an example and some “question words” like:

“What...?”

“How...?”

“Why...”

Ask students to pair off with someone they do not know well. Have students use their list of questions to interview their partner to learn more about them. Make sure students take turns asking questions and practice listening carefully.

Next, ask students to share a few positive things about their partner that they learned. They can answer questions such as:

- “How are they unique?”
- “How are they different from you?”
- “How are they similar to you?”

Finally, lead students in a group reflection about their interview experience.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

Activity: Grades 9-12

Was the Flint, Michigan water crisis an example of environmental injustice?

Context on Issue:

The NPR article found at the following link provides an overview of the water crisis in Flint. This article is a great place to start for context on the issue.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/04/20/465545378/lead-laced-water-in-flint-a-step-by-step-look-at-the-makings-of-a-crisis>

Analyze the demographic data for Flint, Michigan at <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/flint-mi/> then answer the following:

- Define median household income. What is it for the city of Flint?

Now, analyze data from census.gov at <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/09/us-median-household-income-up-in-2018-from-2017.html>

- How does Flint compare with national averages on median income?

Notice poverty rates as defined by the federal government related to receiving health care. <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/>

- How does Flint compare with that data?

Using the data from this source: <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/flint-mi/> Answer the following:

- What is the percentage of minority populations living in Flint, Michigan?

Do you think Flint residents experienced environmental injustice? Why or why not? What measures can the federal government, local residents, and advocates take to ensure water is safe for consumption in Flint? Is clean water a human right? What portion of the 1964 Civil Rights Act can Flint residents argue on their behalf?

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

Additional Resources:

Dr. Robert Bullard, the father of environmental justice, was the first sociologist to conduct a study showing the connection between environmental issues and racism. His late 1970s research was groundbreaking in proving what communities of color knew all along. Follow the link below to read about the Houston environmental issues studied by Dr. Bullard.
<http://drrobertbullard.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Final-2014-Bullard-Cite-Article.pdf>

The Teaching Tolerance program, developed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, offers teaching resources, for multiple grade levels, related to social justice through an anti-bias focus.
<https://www.tolerance.org/search?query=Environmental%20justice>

Teaching Intersectionality and Environmental Justice in Our Classrooms resource guide compiled by the NAACP contains environmental justice resources for multiple age groups.
<https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Teaching%20Intersectionality%20and%20Environmental%20Justice%20in%20Our%20Classrooms%20FINAL.pdf>

The Sierra Club, an environmental grassroots organization, supports environmental justice efforts around the country. Their mission statement is “to discuss and explore the linkages between environmental quality and social justice, and to promote dialogue, increased understanding, and appropriate action.” <https://www.sierraclub.org/environmental-justice>

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.16. Social Studies, Grade 5, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills

(5) History. The student understands important issues, events, and individuals in the United States during the 20th and 21st centuries. The student is expected to:

(A) explain the significance of issues and events of the 20th century such as industrialization, urbanization, the Great Depression, the world wars, the civil rights movement, and military actions

(C) identify the accomplishments and contributions of individuals and groups such as Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Cesar Chavez, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, the Tuskegee Airmen, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team in the areas of civil rights, women's rights, military actions, and politic

(6) Geography. The student understands places and regions in the United States. The student is expected to:

(D) create a map of important physical features such as the Appalachian Mountains, Great Lakes, Mississippi River, Great Plains, and Rocky Mountains.

(7) Geography. The student understands the location and patterns of settlement and the geographic factors that influence where people live. The student is expected to:

(A) identify and describe the patterns of settlement such as rural, urban, and suburban;

(B) explain the geographic factors that influence patterns of settlement and the distribution of population in the United States; and

(8) Geography. The student understands how people adapt to and modify their environment. The student is expected to:

(A) describe how and why people have adapted to and modified their environment in the United States such as the use of human resources to meet basic needs; and

(B) analyze the positive and negative consequences of human modification of the environment in the United States

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.16. Social Studies, Grade 5, Continued

(12) Economics. The student understands patterns of work and economic Activity in the United States. The student is expected to:

(A) compare how people in different regions of the United States earn a living, past and present;

B) identify and explain how geographic factors have influenced the location of economic Activity in the United States;

(17) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of individual participation in the democratic process at the local, state, and national levels. The student is expected to:

(A) explain why individuals have a duty to participate in civic affairs at the local, state, and national levels; and

(B) explain how to contact elected and appointed leaders in local, state, and national governments.

(18) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) identify past and present leaders in the national government, including the president and various members of Congress, and their political parties; and

(B) identify leadership qualities of national leaders, past and present.

(21) Culture. The student understands the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to the United States culture. The student is expected to

(B) summarize the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, and religious groups to our national identity.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.18. Social Studies, Grade 6, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills

(3) Geography. The student understands the factors that influence the locations and characteristics of locations of various contemporary societies on maps and/or globes. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify and explain the geographic factors responsible for patterns of population in places and regions;
- (B) explain ways in which human migration influences the character of places and regions;
- (C) identify and locate major physical and human geographic features such as landforms, water bodies, and urban centers of various places and regions; and

(4) Geography. The student understands how geographic factors influence the economic development and political relationships of societies. The student is expected to

- (A) explain the geographic factors responsible for the location of economic activity in places and regions; and
- (B) identify geographic factors such as location, physical features, transportation corridors and barriers, and distribution of natural resources that influence a society's political relationships.

(5) Geography. The student understands the impact of interactions between people and the physical environment on the development and conditions of places and regions. The student is expected to:

- (A) describe ways people have been impacted by physical processes such as earthquakes and climate;
- (B) identify and analyze ways people have adapted to the physical environment in various places and regions; and
- (C) identify and analyze ways people have modified the physical environment such as mining, irrigation, and transportation infrastructure

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.18. Social Studies, Grade 6, Continued

(11) Citizenship. The student understands that the nature of citizenship varies among societies. The student is expected to:

- (A) describe and compare roles and responsibilities of citizens in various contemporary societies, including the United States; and
- (B) explain how opportunities for citizens to participate in and influence the political process vary among various contemporary societies

(12) Citizenship. The student understands the relationship among individual rights, responsibilities, duties, and freedoms in societies with representative governments. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify and explain the duty of civic participation in societies with representative governments; and
- (B) explain relationships among rights, responsibilities, and duties in societies with representative governments.

(18) Science, technology, and society. The student understands the influences of science and technology on contemporary societies. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify examples of scientific discoveries, technological innovations, and scientists and inventors that have shaped the world;
- (B) explain how resources, economic factors, and political decisions affect the use of technology; and
- (C) make predictions about future social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts that may result from future scientific discoveries and technological innovations.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.19. Social Studies, Grade 7, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills

(15) Citizenship. The student understands the rights and responsibilities of Texas citizens in a democratic society. The student is expected to:

(B) explain civic responsibilities of Texas citizens and the importance of civic participation

(17) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society. The student is expected to:

(A) identify the leadership qualities of elected and appointed leaders of Texas, past and present, including Texans who have been president of the United States; and

(B) identify the contributions of Texas leaders such as Lawrence Sullivan "Sul" Ross, John Nance Garner ("Cactus Jack"), James A. Baker III, Henry B. González, Kay Bailey Hutchison, Barbara Jordan, Raymond L. Telles, Sam Rayburn, and Raul A. Gonzalez Jr.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.41. United States 113.41 History Studies Since 1877, Adopted 2018.

Knowledge and Skills

(2) History. The student understands traditional historical points of reference in U.S. history from 1877 to the present. The student is expected to:

(A) identify the major eras in U.S. history from 1877 to the present and describe their defining characteristics

(9) History. The student understands the impact of the American civil rights movement. The student is expected to:

(C) describe the roles of political organizations that promoted African American, Chicano, American Indian, and women's civil rights;

(D) identify the roles of significant leaders who supported various rights movements, including Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Rosa Parks, and Betty Friedan;

(G) describe presidential actions and congressional votes to address minority rights in the United States, including desegregation of the armed forces, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965;

(I) evaluate changes in the United States that have resulted from the civil rights movement, including increased participation of minorities in the political process

(10) History. The student understands the impact of political, economic, and social factors in the U.S. from the 1970s through 1990. The student is expected to:

(E) describe significant societal issues of this time period such as the War on Drugs and the AIDS epidemic. (Environmental movements)

(11) History. The student understands the emerging political, economic, and social issues of the United States from the 1990s into the 21st century. The student is expected to:

(B) identify significant social and political issues such as health care, immigration, and education from different viewpoints across the political spectrum

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.41. United States 113.41 History Studies Since 1877, Continued

(12) Geography. The student understands the impact of geographic factors on major events. The student is expected to analyze the impact of physical and human geographic factors on the Klondike Gold Rush, the Panama Canal, the Dust Bowl, and the levee failure in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

(13) Geography. The student understands the causes and effects of migration and immigration on American society. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the causes and effects of changing demographic patterns resulting from migration within the United States, including western expansion, rural to urban, the Great Migration, and the Rust Belt to the Sun Belt; and

(B) analyze the causes and effects of changing demographic patterns resulting from immigration to the United States.

(14) Geography. The student understands the relationship between population growth and the physical environment. The student is expected to:

(A) identify the effects of population growth and distribution on the physical environment; and

(B) identify the roles of governmental entities and private citizens in managing the environment such as the establishment of the National Park System, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Endangered Species Act.

(18) Government. The student understands changes over time in the role of government. The student is expected to:

(A) evaluate the impact of New Deal legislation on the historical roles of state and federal government;

(B) explain constitutional issues raised by federal government policy changes during times of significant events, including World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the 1960s, and September 11, 2000

(D) describe the role of contemporary government legislation in the private and public sectors such as the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, USA PATRIOT Act of 2001, and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.41. United States 113.41 History Studies Since 1877, Continued

(19) Government. The student understands the changing relationships among the three branches of the federal government. The student is expected to:

(B) evaluate the impact of relationships among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, including Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt to increase the number of U.S. Supreme Court justices and the presidential election of 2000.

(23) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) evaluate the contributions of significant political and social leaders in the United States such as Andrew Carnegie, Thurgood Marshall, Billy Graham, Sandra Day O'Connor, and Hillary Clinton

(25) Culture. The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. The student is expected to:

(A) explain actions taken by people to expand economic opportunities and political rights for racial, ethnic, gender, and religious groups in American society;

(C) explain how the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, gender, and religious groups shape American culture; and

(26) Science, technology, and society. The student understands the impact of science, technology, and the free enterprise system on the economic development of the United States. The student is expected to:

(A) explain the effects of scientific discoveries and technological innovations such as electric power, telephone and satellite communications, petroleum-based products, steel production, and computers on the economic development of the United States.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.44. United States Government, Adopted 2018

Knowledge and Skills

(2) History. The student understands the roles played by individuals, political parties, interest groups, and the media in the U.S. political system, past and present. The student is expected to:

- (A) describe the processes used by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media to affect public policy; and
- (B) analyze the impact of political changes brought about by individuals, political parties, interest groups, or the media, past and present.

(6) Government. The student understands the American beliefs and principles reflected in the U.S. Constitution and why these are significant. The student is expected to:

- (B) explain how the federal government serves the purposes set forth in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution;
- (F) identify how the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution continue to shape American beliefs and principles in the United States today.

(7) Government. The student understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution. The student is expected to:

- (D) identify the purpose of selected independent executive agencies, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and regulatory commissions, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
- (F) analyze selected issues raised by judicial activism and judicial restraint

(8) Government. The student understands the concept of federalism. The student is expected to:

- (B) categorize government powers as national, state, or shared;
- (C) analyze historical and contemporary conflicts over the respective roles of national and state governments; and
- (D) explain how the U.S. Constitution limits the power of national and state governments

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.44. United States Government, Continued

(12) Citizenship. The student understands the rights that are protected and secured by the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. The student is expected to:

(B) identify and define the unalienable rights;

(13) Citizenship. The student understands the difference between personal and civic responsibilities. The student is expected to:

(A) describe scenarios where good citizenship may require the subordination of personal desire for the sake of the public good

(14) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of voluntary individual participation in the U.S. constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze the effectiveness of various methods of participation in the political process at local, state, and national levels;

(B) analyze historical and contemporary examples of citizen movements to bring about political change or to maintain continuity; and

(C) describe the factors that influence an individual's political attitudes and actions

(15) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of the expression of different points of view in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

(A) analyze different points of view of political parties and interest groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the National Rifle Association (NRA), and the

(B) explain the responsibilities, duties, and obligations of citizenship such as being well informed about civic affairs, serving in the military, voting, serving on a jury, observing the laws, paying taxes, and serving the public good; and

(16) Culture. The student understands the relationship between government policies and the culture of the United States. The student is expected to:

(A) evaluate a U.S. government policy or court decision that has affected a particular racial, ethnic, or religious group such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the U.S. Supreme Court cases of *Hernandez v. Texas* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*; and

(B) explain changes in American culture brought about by government policies such as voting rights, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill of Rights), the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, affirmative action, and racial integration.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

113.44. United States Government, Continued

(17) Science, technology, and society. The student understands the role the government plays in developing policies and establishing conditions that influence scientific discoveries and technological innovations. The student is expected to:

(B) identify examples of government-assisted research that, when shared with the private sector, have resulted in improved consumer products such as computer and communication technologies.

(18) Science, technology, and society. The student understands the impact of advances in science and technology on government. The student is expected to: (A) describe the potential impact of recent scientific discoveries and technological innovations on government policy.

“Creative Conservation:” The Environmental Legacy of Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson 1963-1969

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