**Environment, Pollution, and China**

From: Kate Merkel-Hess and Nicole Gilbertson

**History Standards: 10.10**

Students analyze instances of nation-building in the contemporary world in at least two of the following regions or countries: the Middle East, Africa, Mexico and other parts of Latin America, and China.

**CCSS Standards:**

**Reading**

9. Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

**Writing**

1. Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific content.*

**Guiding Question:** Is China’s environmental crisis a threat to communist rule?

**Lesson Outline:**

1. Teacher starts the day asking students to consider what the biggest environmental challenges are that the world faces today. Class has a discussion and considers what are some things that people, states, and non-governmental institutions are trying to do to solve these problems. Teacher discusses that like the rest of the world, as China has been moving towards industrialization they have also had to deal with the unfettered exploitation of the country’s resources. Teacher show *China from the* Inside, “Shifting Nature” from the beginning to 5:30 found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GNbBniBnqk>

Following the film segment, the class discusses the following questions:

* 1. What are the environmental challenges faced by the Chinese?
	2. Why do they face these challenges?
	3. What are the effects of the pollution?
1. Teachers will then read an article about smog in Beijing as a class. The teacher will then ask students to review the article in pairs and identify the argument and two pieces of supporting evidence. The teacher will debrief this as a whole class and write the argument and supporting evidence on the board, recording it for the class. The article entitled, “Is the China’s Communist Party Choking,” and can be found at:

<http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2013/01/china_s_smog_crisis_poses_a_threat_to_the_legitimacy_of_the_chinese_communist.html>

argument: The government may be losing authority and legitimacy because the Chinese government claims that life is improving, while people see the worsening pollution as a negative consequence of communist rule.

1. Teachers then show students a clip from a video from *Under the Dome* about the effects of Chinese pollution from a journalist, Chai Jing, found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6X2uwlQGQM>

Show the first 5:30 minutes and ask students what is the argument that she is making and what evidence does she use to support her argument. Ask the students if it is effective and what a counterargument or opposition position might be.

For more information about *Under the Dome* and Chinese state reaction read:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/07/world/asia/china-blocks-web-access-to-documentary-on-nations-air-pollution.html?ref=world&_r=1>

<http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/chinablog/inconvenient-truths/>

1. Teachers will then show the government’s position and Chinese online reaction to Beijing’s smog. Teachers can project the website and ask students what is the communist party’s response to the smog? Teachers can have students access the website or post different responses around the room and have the students read them and consider how people are responding to the smog and government response. The information can be found at this link:

<http://www.chinasmack.com/2013/stories/5-surprising-benefits-of-smog-jokes-cctv-chinese-reactions.html>

5. Teachers then ask students to get together in pairs to develop a response to the lesson question: Is China’s environmental crisis a threat to communist rule?

After students write their thesis statements and provide supporting evidence. Teachers lead students in a “thesis statement throwdown” (<http://catlintucker.com/2015/02/thesis-statement-throwdown/>) where each of the partners creates a thesis statement/claim to respond to the question. The teacher calls on two teams and the teams write their thesis statements on the board. Meanwhile, the teacher plays a fun song to get the students engaged. The teacher then does a think aloud editing each of the thesis statements and discussing specific evidence that could be used for each claim. Then the teacher awards a winner.

1. All partners turn in their thesis statements as an exit ticket.
2. Extension activity: Students consider what an environmental challenge is facing them and their local community. Students do research to identify the challenge, the groups dealing with the challenge and their proposed solutions. Students then create an advertising campaign or public service announcement arguing for a specific solution to the issue.