

CLIMATE CHANGE PRIMER



What would you do if you could not access drinkable potable water?

In such a progressive country, like Canada, how is it acceptable that communities are under a boil water advisory?



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Cover Image: Boys beside Canadian National railcar, Africville, with “Please boil this water before drinking and cooking” sign in foreground. [Used with permission from the Nova Scotia Archives Date: ca. 1965. Reference no.: Bob Brooks Nova Scotia Archives 1989-468 vol. 16].

TERMINOLOGY

Climate Change: Extreme changes in weather patterns that are brought on by human activities such as the emission of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane) and land usage in the form of industrial agriculture.¹

Environmental Racism: Policies and practices that disproportionately expose Black, Indigenous and racialized communities to hazardous waste, garbage dumps and poor air pollution or impact how these communities’ access environmental resources such as clean drinking water.

Environmental Justice: When communities have equitable access to resources (e.g. clean water), the ability to determine how resources are used without interference (e.g. corporations) and the political power to influence environmental policies.

Marginalization: The process of excluding communities from fully participating in society and benefiting from economic, social and political participation.

Migration: Permanent or temporary human movement from one country to another due to economic, political or environmental factors.²

Displaced/displacement: The forced movement of people from their home due to economic, political or environmental factors.³

Colonization: The process of expropriating resources such as land and imposing political and economic control over those who have been colonized.

Indigenous Peoples: The original inhabitants of a geographic area who have a distinct history, culture and language from the population which has occupied the geographic area via colonization and/or migration.

Green New Deal: Originating in the United States, the Green New Deal is a set of policies and practices that address environmental sustainability, climate change and economic prosperity; in Canada, it is also incorporating Indigenous reconciliation and migrant justice⁴.

¹ Climate Atlas of Canada. (2019). *Climate change: The basics*. <https://climateatlas.ca/climate-change-basics>

² United Nations. (n.d.). *Migrations*. <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/migration/index.html>

³ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2020). *Complex/mandmade hazards: Displaced populations*. <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/definition-of-hazard/displaced-populations/>

⁴ The Pact for a Green New Deal. (n.d.). Building a vision for a green deal for everyone. <https://greennewdealcanada.ca/>



PURPOSE

As part of ETFO's ongoing efforts towards equity and social justice, this new resource was developed to inform the membership about how the themes such as environmental racism, colonization and migration merge with climate change. This resource includes terminology, case studies, acknowledgement of change makers, and resources for members to build their knowledge and understanding to inform their instructional practices. ETFO Members play an important and crucial role in raising awareness and creating learning environments for students that promote dialogue using a social justice and equity lens. This resource is accessible at the ETFO website under Building a Just Society. (when we provide the link, it can be included).

INTRODUCTION

With melting polar ice caps, catastrophic forest fires and record-breaking heat waves becoming our collective reality, how did this all begin? What we now refer to as climate change (formally called the greenhouse effect) raised concern in 1988 for scientists to call for a 20% cut in carbon dioxide emissions.⁵ Since 1990, the need for the governments to curb emissions and adopt practices for a sustainable future has resulted in the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the development of international agreements such as the [Rio Convention](#), [Kyoto Protocol](#) and the [Paris Agreement](#).

With more environmental and historical awareness, a growing concern for the disproportionate ways in which different communities experience climate change has led to the climate justice movement. By integrating social and economic inequality into climate action, it becomes more apparent that displacement, migration and food scarcity affect the most marginalized communities. According to the International Organization for Migration, in 2018 the climate migration led to "17.2 million new displacements associated with disasters in 148 countries and territories."⁶

Greater awareness of how environmental action and how social justice intersect has also led to more solidarity between movements. Indigenous and racialized communities have been organizing on environmental racism as a result of historical inequities related to access to resources or contemporary issues around urban planning and exposure to environmental contaminants. The Green New Deal has integrated the need for a sustainable future and economic justice so that all workers can thrive in a green economy. With the immediacy of climate action, we are affirming our interconnectedness and interdependency and realizing that our collective future requires collective action.

⁵ Marshall, M. (2006). Timeline: Climate change. *New Scientist*. <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn9912-time-line-climate-change/#ixzz6HZ5WEcuY>

⁶ Lonesco, D. (2019). *Let's Talk About Climate Migrants, Not Climate Refugees*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/06/lets-talk-about-climate-migrants-not-climate-refugees/>

ETFO AND CLIMATE

To address climate and environmental injustices, ETFO supports initiatives that aim to protect the natural environment, including the [People's Climate March](#), the [Say No to Nestlé](#) campaign, and also drawing awareness of the [Grassy Narrows water crisis](#). In supporting members in learning, ETFO highlights environmental [resources](#) and has included articles in the [Voice magazine](#). ETFO assisted in the development of the [Natural Curiosity 2nd Edition: The Importance of Indigenous Perspectives in Children's Environmental Inquiry](#) resource. The ETFO provincial office is also the [first LEED Platinum certified](#) office building in Toronto and the first Canadian Geothermal Energy building.

CASE STUDY - ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Indigenous Peoples in Canada have a distinct relationship with the natural environment. As the original inhabitants of Canada, Indigenous Peoples relied solely on the land and natural resources for survival, including dietary, medicines, clothing and shelter, and trade. [Indigenous Knowledge](#) and worldview are directly reflective of the diversity of Indigenous Peoples in relationship to their customary lands. With Canada, and the settlement of newcomers, the political and economic practices were infringed on Indigenous Peoples. The disruption in the ways of life for Indigenous Peoples was impacted through colonial and assimilative practices, including residential schools, the *Indian Act*, and the establishment of reservations, and environmental racism.

One of the main purposes of colonialism was to acquire land and natural resources for economy, and to establish properties for the ever-growing Canadian settler population. In order to access land for mining, lumber, road and railway infrastructures, or for residential uses, many Indigenous Peoples were removed from their traditional lands and relocated to less desired areas. In some cases, Indigenous communities were relocated to areas where flooding would naturally occur. This was just the start of environmental racism. Fast forward to today, the acts of environmental racism continues. Here are just three examples: There are over 100 Indigenous communities that have [water advisories](#) in place; the contamination of waters, including Grassy Narrows First Nation and a [mercury spill](#) that occurred between 1962 and 1970 still impacts the people and the fish and wildlife today; and the [Wet'suwet'en Nations protest](#) to stopping a pipeline go through their lands in fear of contamination.

For many Indigenous groups that have agreed to share the land with Canada (and its settlers) through Treaties and agreements, the impacts of environmental racism persists. The economic gain by industries, governments and citizens has not been equitable for the first peoples of this land. Reconciliation must include a "[duty to consult](#)" with Indigenous Peoples. The more we learn about these colonial practices and environmental impacts on Indigenous Peoples, the more we can understand our place in the journey to reconciliation.



CASE STUDY - ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM: AFRICAN CANADIANS

Much like Indigenous groups in Canada, the history of African Canadian communities is one that is largely centered on them routinely being the victims of systematic, intentional oppression from the government and the dominant group in society. Examples of well-developed economic communities such as [Hogan's Alley](#) in British Columbia and [Africville](#) in Nova Scotia had to contend with having their communities being built near garbage dumps, railways and other neglected, less desirable areas. Africville specifically provides an example that we can all learn from. A community largely made up of slaves who escaped from the United States, Africville was established in the 1800's with many individuals who served in the [War of 1812](#). Once settled, the following quote provides context on the numerous challenges these Canadians faced:

"Throughout the 20th century, the City of Halifax never extended water or sanitation services to the residents of Africville, even though it collected taxes from property owners there. The City dumped its garbage in Africville, poisoning the community with mounds of toxic waste. Hospitals dumped medical waste in Africville. The City even ran a sewer pipe from hospitals into the Africville water supply, silently serving the people a toxic cocktail."⁷

Though it didn't get past the second reading, environmental racism was such a key, reoccurring issue in Nova Scotia that an "Environmental Protection Act" bill was created in 2015.⁸ The later destruction of this community would be replicated in Hogan's Alley, British Columbia and more recently in parts of Toronto such as [Regent Park](#), where communities that were once neglected and ignored become "revitalized" for profit through mass evictions and destruction.

CASE STUDY - CLIMATE ACTION IS POLITICAL WORK

Without the political will of governments, the climate crisis will continue. In 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported the impacts of an increase in global warming of 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels (the historical period known as the industrial revolution). The report detailed the adverse effects of climate change on ecosystems and human communities and the necessity for national governments to mitigate these effects through policies and practices.

At the national level, carbon pricing has been adopted as a way to curtail greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while also providing financial incentives for industry and individuals. Referred to as the *Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act*, "the federal carbon pollution pricing system contains a trading system for large industry, known as the output-based pricing system and a regulatory charge on fuel (fuel charge)."⁹ In spite of these efforts, Canada is one of the largest GHG emitters in the world.¹⁰

7 Gobby, J. (2019). Environmental Racism in Africville, Nova Scotia, Canada: EJAtlas. <https://www.ejAtlas.org/conflict/africville-nova-scotia>

8 Office of the Legislative Counsel, Nova Scotia House of Assembly. (2018). *Environmental Racism Prevention Act*. https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/62nd_2nd/1st_read/b111.htm

9 Government of Canada. (2019). *How we're putting a price on carbon pollution*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/pricing-pollution-how-it-will-work/putting-price-on-carbon-pollution.html>

10 Carbon Brief. (2019). *The carbon brief profile: Canada*. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/the-carbon-brief-profile-canada>

In Ontario, the Ford Government ended the [Cap and Trade program](#) as one of its election promises. This initiative put a limit on GHG emissions by companies and allowed them to trade allowances if they were under limits or buy allowances if they were over.¹¹ In 2018, the [Made in Ontario Environmental Plan](#) was developed, however, it has been critiqued for not meeting the necessary reduction in GHG emissions. By 2030, the Liberal government had committed to reduce emissions by 37 percent below 1990 levels.¹² In comparison, the Ford Government has set a 30 percent below 2005 levels.¹³ Given the necessity to bring down GHG emissions, governments at all levels need to act. Immediate actions such as financial incentives for green industries and investing in accessible public transit can be achieved if the climate crisis becomes a political priority. However, longer term strategies such as a transition to a low-carbon economy is required so that the climate crisis does not become a climate emergency.

CONCLUSION

As the climate crisis continues to intensify, the priority for all of us as members and global citizens is to prepare students for the pending challenges that await them as adults. While the situation can appear quite dire, students also rely on us for hope and resources that can confirm the positive news. This can come in ways that we least suspect such as the ongoing COVID-19 situation. The dangers and direct impacts that it has presented are numerous but there have been positive developments environmentally including the manner in which the earth is quickly regenerating itself. Many areas have reported dramatic decreases in CO2 emissions as industries are put on pause as well as water supplies and natural habitats being restored to their natural states. In moving forward, we can take some of the lessons that we've learned from this situation and apply them on a regular basis.

The environment is something that every human relies on to survive. The protection of this is critical and the responsibility of every human on the planet, not just those living in Canada. There is a lot of work that needs to be done on our part to ensure that we leave this world a better place for our future generations. It is also important to learn about the impacts environmental racism has had on specific communities. These impacts, all instilled by the practices and policies of the Government, are not acceptable. Standing together in solidarity to protect the environment and address issues that impact others is necessary. ETFO Members are and can continue be change makers, providing students with factual information on the environmental impacts of green house emissions, recycling, water crisis, and environmental racism.

11 Syed, F. (2018). Here's what you need to know about Ontario's termination of cap and trade. *Canada's National Observer*. <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2018/11/01/news/heres-what-you-need-know-about-ontarios-termination-cap-and-trade>

12 Ontario. (2015). *Ontario First Province in Canada to Set 2030 Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Target*. <https://news.ontario.ca/ene/en/2015/05/ontario-first-province-in-canada-to-set-2030-greenhouse-gas-pollution-reduction-target.html>

13 Ontario. (2019). *Climate change*. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/climate-change>



CHANGE MAKERS

There are many people doing social and environmental justice work. These individuals are change makers. They are seeking ways to change practices, policies and laws in order to protect the natural environment and to end environmental racism. Here are three change makers to learn about.

The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU)

“Gentrification is Environmental Racism: Affordable Housing for All.”

For many years, a group of trade unionists have been advocating within their unions and central labour bodies to put issues of racism and discrimination – in the workplace and unions – higher on labour’s agenda. A local chapter of this parent organization was established in 1996 and in recent years, they have become leaders in promoting the cause of environmental racism. By establishing lessons and curriculum in partnership with the ACW (Adapting Canadian Work), the CBTU is an organization ETFO members should be aware of when thinking of groups fighting for environmental justice for marginalized people. For more information, visit cbtu.ca.

David Suzuki

“We are creatures of the Earth, and everything we learn about the Earth teaches us about ourselves.”

David Suzuki is an internationally recognized geneticist popular television host and vocal environmental activist. Since 1979, he has hosted CBC’s *The Nature of Things* which is a documentary series about science, technology and society. He co-founded the David Suzuki Foundation in 1990 which has been raising awareness about myriad environmental issues ranging from biodiversity to environmental rights. David Suzuki has used scientific research and his fame to also advocate for First Nations communities, environmental justice and climate change. For information, visit davidsuzuki.org.

Idle No More

“Idle No More calls on all people to join in a peaceful revolution, to honour Indigenous sovereignty, and to protect the land and water”

The movement began with four women from Saskatchewan (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) who, in 2012, stood up against Government legislation that would impede on Indigenous sovereignty and impact the environment. Thousands of Indigenous Peoples and allies across Canada joined in unity to stand up for protection of the environment and to protest neo-colonialism. This grassroots movement has inspired many teach-ins across the country and resources have been compiled to educate and inform others on the historical and current realities that Indigenous Peoples are faced with today, including oppression, discrimination and environmental racism. For more information, visit idlenomore.ca.

WHAT CAN YOU DO

The work of educating our population on environmental racism and climate change depends on your voice and role in several ways.

In the Classroom: Ensure that all stories on climate change have multiple voices and perspectives listed. If talking about Greta Thunberg, be sure to mention Autumn Pelletier and other diverse perspectives. If we are discussing issues of clean water, ensure that students learn about Flint Michigan, and the fact that this issue is so vital in Indigenous communities in North America, Africa and other parts of the world.

As a Member: Your local and provincial office make decisions everyday that can impact our environment that go beyond choosing to recycle (which we hope is being done a regular basis). Choosing to print and create new materials, purchasing bottled water and/or considering which charitable organizations you would like to support are all factors that can impact the environment locally and internationally. Be sure to consider the impacts that marginalized folks in your area face and see how ETFO, as a social justice-based organization, can stand in solidarity with and support local/regional causes. Environmental justice is social justice.

RESOURCES

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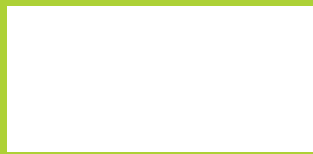
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