What is environmental justice?

Environmental justice is the idea that every person has the right to a healthy environment. It also means that every person has the right to be involved in decisions about what happens to that environment.

Environmental Justice Movement Fights

The environmental justice movement started in the 1970s. A woman named Lois Gibbs was one of the movement's leaders early on. In 1978 Gibbs led protests against the contamination of a neighborhood known as “Love Canal” in upstate New York. Gibbs and other families complained that their children had gotten sick from toxic waste buried under their town in the 1950s. The activists wanted to stop corporations from dumping hazardous wastes in local communities. They
protested to try and get the government to take action. Their efforts led to the creation of the Comprehensive Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980. The law allowed the U.S. government to collect millions of dollars from polluters.
In September 1982, the North Carolina government decided to bury 6,000 tons of polluted soil in Warren County. The soil had dangerous chemicals, so people in Warren County worried it would pollute their water. They protested six weeks, but the soil still got dumped. However, the protests mattered. They made the news. More people started to care about the environmental justice movement. Groups put out new studies. The studies proved minorities and the communities they lived in were dealing with dangerous wastes more than other communities. One such study came out in 1987. It was called “Toxic Waste and Race in the United States.”

**Linking Hazardous Waste Dump Sites To Race**

The early 1990s were key. There are three reasons why this time was important. First, an important book came out about toxic waste dumped in lower-class communities where a lot of people of color lived. Also, environmental justice groups wrote a letter that asked other environmental groups to step up. Finally, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit happened in D.C. The summit offered people advice about making the movement stronger.

**President Clinton's Order Gives Boost To Movement**

President Bill Clinton issued an important order in 1994 that gave the environmental justice movement a boost. He required that the government include environmental justice in its policies and programs. His order also prevented the government from dumping hazardous waste in low-income neighborhoods. It also forced those responsible for the waste to find other solutions. These solutions would need to be safer.

The environmental justice movement is worldwide today. It has come a long way since the 1970s. Environmental justice is essential to sustainability. Environmental justice addresses how people are affected by decisions made about environmental issues. The environmental justice movement helps people consider the connections between those decisions and their impacts on communities.

**Indigenous People Protest Pipeline Project**

Indigenous people have played a key role in the environmental justice movement.
For example, you may have heard of #NoDAPL. The hashtag is about protests that began in 2016. The goal of the protests was to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline project. The company behind project wanted a pipeline to carry oil underground from Illinois to North Dakota. The #NoDAPL protests started at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation, which is in North Dakota and South Dakota. Members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe were upset that the pipeline would go through their lands, and worried it would pollute their water if it leaked. They also worried the pipeline would disrupt sacred burial grounds. Thousands of people came to protest with them. At the end of 2016 the government blocked the pipeline from being finished. Barack Obama was still president back then, but things changed. Donald Trump became president in January 2017, and he said he would let construction continue.
The protesters could not stop the project, but they still made a difference. The protests attracted much attention from the news media. People across the world paid more attention to the environmental justice movement as a result.
Quiz

1 One MAIN idea of the article is that people can make a difference when they work together. What is another MAIN idea of the article?

(A) The Dakota Access Pipeline would give more people oil.
(B) Movements can help save lives and the environment.
(C) North Carolina has a pollution issue with buried soil.
(D) President Trump wants to continue construction of the pipeline.

2 Read the sentences summarizing the MAIN ideas of the article.

The environmental justice movement was started in the 1970s. Since then, it has grown and helped enact a lot of environmental change.

Which answer choice would complete the summary?

(A) The work of the movement has been supported by most presidents.
(B) Much of the work of the movement was reversed by polluters in North Carolina.
(C) There is still work to be done as new environmental threats arise.
(D) The movement was started by Lois Gibbs to halt contamination in New York.

3 Read the selection from the section "Environmental Justice Movement Fights."

In 1978 Gibbs led protests against the contamination of a neighborhood known as “Love Canal” in upstate New York. Gibbs and other families complained that their children had gotten sick from toxic waste buried under their town in the 1950s. The activists wanted to stop corporations from dumping hazardous wastes in local communities.

What is the meaning of the word “toxic” as it is used in the selection above?

(A) hidden
(B) buried
(C) small
(D) dangerous
Read the first sentence of the article.

*Environmental justice is the idea that every person has the right to a healthy environment.*

Which sentence uses the word "right" in the SAME way as the sentence above?

(A) She did not see the hole even though it was right in front of her.

(B) He guessed at the answer to the question and still got it right.

(C) She told the driver to turn right at the end of the street.

(D) He won the right to choose a prize after his name was drawn.