

# Teaching about Water Shortage as a Source of Conflict and War Using the Internet

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Selecting the topic for this column is always an interesting process. Some issues of *Social Education* are “themed” issues and the topic is pre-selected. In other cases, an idea will come to me while reading, watching, or listening to something, like watching my wife use sign language during the singing of the National Anthem, which led to the column on using national anthems to teach world history and culture. This issue’s topic came as a result of attending the Annual Meeting of the Social Science Education Consortium (SSEC) in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, this past June. The conference theme, “Water and the West,” focused on the growing problems associated with diminishing water resources and population growth throughout the Western states, particularly those that have relied on the Colorado River and its tributaries. But I have been reading about water shortages, lack of safe drinking water, and conflicts among nations and groups within nations over water and its use for many years. *The Huffington Post*, in a story titled “Prepare for the Next Conflict: Water Wars,”<sup>1</sup> cited a U.S. Senate report warning of coming water wars in Central and South Asia, the effects of which “would be felt all over the world.”

The conflicts over water resources won’t be limited to Central and South Asia. At the Colorado SSEC conference, we learned about conflicts between urban and suburban communities trying to obtain water rights and legislative battles between agricultural interests and rapidly growing population centers. Worldwide climate change is also a factor. Some climatologists predict widening drought areas in the central United States, middle Asia, and Australia. LiveScience ([www.livescience.com](http://www.livescience.com)), an outstanding website that I have on my favorites/bookmark list, says that while climate change and water shortages have been the world’s “twin impending disasters,”

the most pressing problem and dilemma for Earth’s future is the shortage of water.

It’s important to find ways of integrating this issue into the social studies curriculum. If students can understand how education, the economy, and political stability are dependent on water resources, they will be better able to make both private and public decisions as citizens in a participatory democratic society. There are a tremendous number of websites dealing with the topic of worldwide water shortages and the likelihood of potential societal and political conflict. I’ve selected those that combine both content that helps both students and teachers understand the issue as well as lesson

plans and teaching strategies.

## The Huffington Post

[www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/22/world-water-day-2013-facts\\_n\\_2927389.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/22/world-water-day-2013-facts_n_2927389.html)

[www.huffingtonpost.com/erik-rasmussen/water-wars\\_b\\_844101.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/erik-rasmussen/water-wars_b_844101.html)

I’ve listed two separate resources from *The Huffington Post*. The first is a compelling overview of the extent and significance of world water shortages calling it a women’s issue, a hunger issue, a child mortality issue, and an education issue. This is an excellent background page for teachers and will bring the issue to students in a compelling manner. The second page is Eric Rasmussen’s comprehensive overview of how internal and international conflicts over water are in our future unless global action is taken. Teachers who read these two items will grasp the complexity and importance of this topic.

## The Water Project

<http://thewaterproject.org/resources/lesson-plans.php>

The Water Project is an excellent source for well-designed, comprehensive lesson plans for teachers at all grade levels. First, there’s an excellent Teacher’s Guide which has categories

titled “The Problem,” “The Solution,” and “Additional Resources.” Click on “Download Free Lesson Plans” and you will be asked for your e-mail address and name. They promise not to sell your name. This is a good place for lesson plans on this important topic.

### Water.org

<http://water.org/news/lesson-plans/>

This is an outstanding lesson plan site. There are full-curriculum downloads for the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Within each level, there are several units on topics such as “World Water Hero!” (Grades K-5) and “Rising Tensions over the Nile River Basin.” Each curriculum level has a “National Curriculum Alignment” section. **Water.org** has many other resources for teachers. Check out the entire site.

### Discovery Education

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/activities/watereverywhere/>

This is only one lesson, but it’s a good one. Designed by a former classroom teacher, “Water, Water, Everywhere,” is primarily for grades 6–10, but can be easily adapted for other grades. It includes links to student handouts and data charts. You can search through other Discovery lessons by clicking back to “Classroom Resources” and then “Lesson Plan Library.”

### Global Concerns Classroom

<http://gcc.concernusa.org/media/pdf/WaterToolkit.pdf>

This site features a Water Toolkit that provides a comprehensive approach for teachers and students about world water shortages and how many are leading to conflict. It features all types of student projects and activities. There’s a 7-minute video focusing on water shortages in Haiti and how they affect the entire society, but particularly hurt children. For individual teachers and even teachers at different grade levels or teaching other subject areas, this Water Toolkit is a great resource.



### Pacific Institute—The World’s Water

<http://worldwater.org/conflict.htm>

You won’t find a better set of resources to prove to yourself and your students that conflicts over water have led to wars in the past and are threatening wars today. There are three primary data sources on this page covering conflicts over water from 3000 B.C.E. to today. They include: (1) a list that can be filtered by region, conflict type, and date; (2) a timeline showing when water conflicts occurred; and (3) an interactive map showing the geographical location of conflicts over water and information about each conflict. The Pacific Institute also has a variety of other excellent resources on this topic.

As I mentioned earlier, there are dozens of outstanding websites on this topic and many include lesson plans. World leaders believe that water shortages are at the top of major problems facing our planet. If this is the case, then our students should know more about it. That’s one more reason the world needs us (social studies educators).

One final note: I decided on this topic at the SSEC meeting in Colorado. The SSEC holds its annual meeting one year in the United States and the next overseas. Last year, we met in Costa Rica, this year in Colorado, and next June, we’ll meet in Rome. SSEC membership used to be “by invitation only,” but now, any NCSS member can also join the SSEC. My professional career has been enhanced tremendously by my membership and participation in the SSEC. I encourage all NCSS members to check it out. 🌐

### Note

1. Erik Rasmussen, “Prepare for the Next Conflict: Water Wars,” *The Huffington Post* (April 12, 2011), [www.huffingtonpost.com/erik-rasmussen/water-wars\\_b\\_844101.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/erik-rasmussen/water-wars_b_844101.html).

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