

Grade Level: Middle School
Subject Area: Social Studies

Purpose of Lesson: Students will examine different policies governments can use to address environmental problems, with emphasis on environmental problems that occur in Japan

Time Necessary: 2 Class periods

Essential Understandings: Students will examine how people in different societal positions react to shared environmental problems.

Key Concepts:

Smart growth; citizen participation, recycling, tax credits, pollution limits, and fuel standards

Applicable Standards:

MD 1.1.3 The student will evaluate roles and policies the government has assumed regarding public issues.

LESSON/UNIT SUMMARY

In this lesson students examine environmental problems that occur in Japan and around the world, and various policy responses that government can take to help alleviate these problems. Students spend time practicing when certain policies are appropriate and how they contribute to an overall “smart growth” framework. As a culminating activity, students will role play a town hall meeting in which the students take on different roles of a Japanese town outside of Tokyo. Students will voice their interests depending on their role, and determine which policy best supports their interest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Smart growth policies have become increasingly popular with governments throughout the world in the last 20 years as a way to address strained environmental systems, population growth, and changing infrastructure. The policies vary depending on the country, but the overall values and policy ideals are largely the same. As Japan has developed, different parts of the country have experimented with a variety of environmental policies, including those that are examined in this lesson.

MATERIALS

Projector, powerpoint presentation, and handouts

SET-UP AND EQUIPMENT

Projector and projector screen is necessary for the first part of the lesson.

Standard classroom set-up for the majority of the lesson.

For the town hall simulation, a U-shaped seating arrangement would work best, though other arrangements may work fine as well.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Assess student participation in town hall meeting.

Assess student answers from the “Smart Growth” assignment.

ADAPTATION AND DIFFERENTIATION

Modify student work time/load.

Allow students to choose which role they want to fulfill/feel comfortable with for the Town Hall simulation.

IMPLEMENTATION (introduction/hook, teaching strategies, learning activities, and concluding questions)
Begin the lesson with the powerpoint presentation, to build interest and introduce the concepts of Smart Growth.

Then, turn to the handouts on Smart Growth applications and solutions for the environment.

Model how to answer each type of question.

Conclude the lesson with the Town Hall meeting, in which students play different roles of Japanese citizens responding to environmental problems along the coast. The role play allows students to envision real-world application of smart growth principles while recognizing the sometimes opposing interests of citizens due to their position. This highlights the difficulties in building consensus when attempting to solve environmental problems. For more information and learning questions, refer to each handout.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Have students research other current environmental problems in Japan. Students may apply smart growth solutions or research other novel solutions. Students may also research other environmental initiatives in Japan and present their findings in class.

CONCLUSION

The framework of smart growth policies and different citizen perspectives can be used when analyzing environmental issues worldwide.