

Puget Sound Project: The Changing Sound

Introduction

Puget Sound is a region enormously rich in natural resources. Our timber, hydroelectric power and fisheries are world famous. Puget Sound is also a region beset by increasing conflict over the allocation, and, in fact, the very future of those same resources.

Part of the Puget Sound Project, "The Changing Sound ", uses oysters as a vehicle to focus on Puget Sound as an ecosystem which includes rivers and watersheds as well as saltwater environments. It also highlights the difficult and complex choices Puget Sound residents must make concerning the management of our natural resources. Presented through student activities focusing on human interaction with oyster populations, several of the issues have implications for all of us who live in the northwest today.

Take a minute to thumb through the sequence of lessons in "The Changing Sound". You will find that activities in this unit include material from many disciplines: geography, history, science investigations, writing, and problem solving, for example. These activities are woven together by a student text which traces the decline of the once abundant native Olympia oyster and the subsequent rise and decline of the Japanese oyster - introduced to compensate for native oyster decline. Because some lessons refer back to earlier ones, your students will need to compile and retain all of the materials you provide to them during the course of the unit. A good system is individual student folders, to which they should add their daily work.

Puget Sound's natural resources are important to all of us residing in the region as well as to our visitors and nation. Various groups assign different levels of importance to individual resources. As a result, some of the groups conflict with one another. In attempting to understand some of today's controversies surrounding Puget Sound's natural resources, it is valuable to look at practices of the past which have had a major impact on those resources. It is not our goal in presenting these issues to inflame negativity against one group or another but to present the relationship of people to the natural environment as the complex picture that it is.

The "Puget Sound Project" curriculum also looks at the increasing pressure which we place on our natural environment. Environmental issues these days are inevitably disturbing. We are living at a time when natural balances on many fronts seem to be tipping. Our society as a whole seems to be inclined to make descisions for the present without much regard for the

future. On one level, this is not surprising; most of us are preoccupied with the daily struggle of "just getting by." But the consequences of this kind of short-sightedness to future generations are frightening to think about.

All of us, especially today's youth, need to understand the compromises our society is making with its environment. We need to recognize the consequences of today's actions on the quality of life for future generations. Most of all, we need to acknowledge the role we as individuals play in the degradation of our environment and look for steps to responsible action. We encourage you to take every opportunity to focus your students' attention on how the future -- their future -- is being shaped by our actions, how the root of our problems usually turns out to be our own lifestyle decisions, and how the solution to our problems also lies in our own lifestyle decisions.

One way to help your students make the connection between the topics raised in this unit and the events in their own lives is to encourage them to watch for articles in the newspapers which deal with the issues addressed. Almost every day, local and regional newspapers run articles on such topics as water quality, habitat degradation or enhancement, resource allocation, or land use controversies. Discussing these relevant local issues and events will add depth to the material in this unit.

We hope you and your students will find the "Puget Sound Project" both enjoyable and thought-provoking. As you use these materials we hope you will take the time to give us feedback on their appropriateness, and their effectiveness, in your classroom. Thanks for caring enough to incorporate these materials into your teaching.