



## LESSON PLAN: "Thirst"

Written by Terri Carta

### Introduction

Global corporations are rapidly buying up local water supplies, and communities face losing control of one of their most precious resources. Looking at tensions in Bolivia, India and Stockton, California, THIRST reveals how water is becoming the catalyst for explosive community resistance to globalization. Focusing on one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's greatest issues, this film is a piercing look at the conflict between public stewardship and private profit, where activists claim that water is a human right and corporations declare it a commodity. The aim of this lesson plan is to look at water privatization as both a local and global issue affecting all of us and to explore the impacts of water privatization on our local communities.

### Grade Level

This lesson plan is designed to be used with high school students but can also be adapted to older grade levels or groups who want to go further with the subject. Please see the Extensions section below for ideas on how to do this.

### Subject Areas

This lesson plan specifically addresses concepts in the Social Sciences (Civics and Economics) and Science in Personal and Social Perspective. The film may also be of interest to those interested in agriculture, conservation, democracy/government, ecology, economics, education, environment, foreign policy, gender, globalization, human rights, poverty, social justice, sociology, and sustainable development.

### Objectives

This lesson aims to engage students in an exploration of water privatization issues and the debate between publicly and privately held resources. By the end of this lesson, students will

- be able to define privatization;
- understand the basic factors behind privatization of water resources;
- discuss water as a shared "commons" vs. a private commodity in the global marketplace; and
- be able to define citizenship and discuss it as it relates to individual participation in democratic process.

### Time Needed for Completion

Three to four classroom hours

### Materials

- Copy of THIRST
- Classroom or other space for activity
- Computer with Internet access (for further research)

## Procedure

### Introduction of Lesson and Defining Privatization:

1. Explain to the class that the film they are about to see, THIRST, is a documentary about water privatization and that the related activities that they will do aim to explore this issue more fully.
2. Ask the class to define privatization (you may want to create a concept map on the board, writing all that comes to mind when students think about privatization). You can start by asking students about the difference between public and private and by having them identify elements in your community that are within each category (i.e. public schools, libraries, streets, parks, government, etc; and private schools, homes, businesses and organizations, etc...). You can also point out that the suffix “ation” refers to the process of doing something, in this case the process of making something private that was once public. (Other examples include evolution – the process of evolving; consumption – the process of consuming something, etc...)
3. (Optional – see Assessment Suggestions section) Have students write a short paragraph about whether they think water is part of a shared “commons,” a basic human right for all people, or a commodity to be bought and sold in the global marketplace?

### **What is The Commons?**

“The commons is everywhere. It is the air we breathe, the words we speak, the traditions we respect. It is tangible and intangible, ancient and modern, local and global. It is everything we inherit together, as part of a community, as distinct from things we inherit individually. It is everything that is not privately or state-owned. ...”

Read more at <http://www.earthisland.org/tbi/whatiscommons.html>.

Other online links on the commons:

*The Demand for the Common Good* by Jonathan Rowe (YES! Magazine Summer 2004)

<http://www.futurenet.org/30goodlife/rowe.htm>

Rediscovery of the Commons: Managing for the Common Good, Not Just for the Corporate Good (TomPaine.com, July 2002)

<http://www.tompaine.com/feature.cfm/ID/6016>

### **Viewing THIRST:**

1. While viewing the film, have students write down definitions (or questions, if definitions may not be deduced from the film itself) for the following terms. Terms may be written on the board beforehand for students to copy into a notebook, or a handout may be created.
  - Privatization
  - Globalization
  - Multinational Corporation
  - Citizen
  - Community Activist
  - Global Commons
  - Commodity
  - Global Marketplace
  - Human Rights
  - Civil Rights
  - Indignation
2. Also while viewing the film, ask students to take note of arguments both for and against water privatization. You may want students to focus on one case study (Bolivia, India or Stockton, California) or you may want them to take note of pro/con arguments in general from the entire film.
3. After the film, assess understanding of the above terms by asking students to define the words as a class, especially those that pertain to the following discussion question.
4. To debrief/discuss the film, ask the class the following question as posed by Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan:  
Is water part of a shared “commons,” a basic human right for all people, or is it a commodity to be bought and sold in the global marketplace?
5. (Optional – see Assessment Suggestions section) Have students write out their answer to the above question in class or for a homework assignment.

As stems for further discussion, some of the following questions may be helpful:

- What does it mean to say that water is a human right?
- In the film, Dale Stocking of Sacramento, California states that he is an “involved citizen” and not a “community activist.” What is the difference between the two? Which one are you, if either? Which one would you rather be and why?
- In the film, Mayor Gary Podesto of Stockton, California, states that it is time to start thinking of citizens as customers. What do you think about the notion that citizens are viewed as customers? Would you rather be viewed as an American or a customer?
- What does it mean to be a citizen? What rights to citizens have? What responsibilities to citizens have?
- Mayor Podesto of Stockton, California, when asked about people protesting, responded, “people confuse this with that globalization issue.” What is the difference between globalization and privatization?

### **The Town Hall Meeting:**

As a culminating exercise, have students hold a “Town Hall Meeting” in your classroom where each student is assigned a role to play that matches your particular community. This should correlate as much as possible to the particular organizational structure of your own town/city/region/district, but the basic roles to assign would be as follows:

- Mayor (or some top local government official)

- City Council Members (or elected or appointed officials that represent the people)
  - Local Water Authority Employees/Managers/Administrators
  - Private Water Company Representatives
  - Local Citizens against water privatization
  - Local Citizens for water privatization
  - Moderator (could be the teacher, or someone who will keep the discussion on track and ensure meaningful/respectful dialogue)
  - Other roles as appropriate for your local situation
1. Describe the scene (like Stockton, California in the film) – that a large, multinational water company (name can be made up by student representatives) has approached your local government and wants to purchase the rights to your water supply. In return, they propose to invest heavily in the city and local economy and promise to deliver clean water to everybody in town. Some people are for this initiative, and some are against. The Mayor, with democratic process in mind, has decided to hold a Town Hall Meeting (or whatever you want to call it) so that everybody’s voice can be heard. Each student will play a role in this Town Hall Meeting.
  2. Assign student roles and have students work in small groups (as appropriate) to compile their arguments. Research time may be needed, or at least several minutes (20 minutes minimum) for students to write out/gather their notes. They should prepare a brief statement as to why their view is “correct” as well as prepare notes for possible questions that either support or challenge their platform.
  3. Prepare a Town Hall Meeting Agenda of who will speak and in which order.
  4. The “Moderator” should call the Town Hall Meeting to order. Have each student, or group of students, deliver their statement to the rest of the “meeting participants” according to the Agenda. Depending on available time, you may want to allow questions after each speaker, hold questions to the very end, or only allow statements without questions.
  5. Once all have spoken, have the City Council Members (or elected officials that represent the people) cast their votes either for or against the water privatization proposal based on the arguments heard during the Town Hall Meeting.
  6. As a debrief exercise, ask students to share their experience playing the various roles. Did they find it difficult to play the various roles? How closely was this experience to the situation in Stockton, California in the film? Was the outcome the same as in Stockton? What did they learn by doing this exercise?

### **Assessment Suggestions**

1. Written definitions to key terms associated with the film.
2. Have students answer the following question both as an opening exercise before they have viewed the film, and again after the film and debrief discussion: Is water part of a shared “commons,” a basic human right for all people, or is it a commodity to be bought and sold in the global marketplace?  
Compare the two answers for growth and depth of understanding.
3. Participation in Town Hall Meeting (i.e. contribution to group’s overall presentation, teamwork, research, oral presentation, written statement, etc...).

## **Extensions**

- Research the case history of Cochabamba, Bolivia and identify the factors that lead to the success of the people in removing Bechtel Corporation from their community. Write a summary of these success factors. What role did Oscar Olivera play in this process? What type of leader was he? The people of Cochabamba had a chant during their protests: “The people, united, will never be defeated.” If this is true, what happened in the case of Stockton, California? Why were the people defeated?
- Research your local water supply system: Who manages and distributes your water supply? How old is the water transportation/distribution system? Are repairs needed? How much might these repairs cost? Have there been any proposals for privatization of your local water supply? Which company(s) was(were) involved? What happened? Who was for and who was against this proposal?

## **Related National Standards for Grades 9-12**

### **Social Sciences Standards:**

#### Social Sciences

- People, Places, and Environment
- Individual Development and Identity
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Global Connections

#### Civics

- Civic Life, Politics and Government
- Roles of the Citizen

#### Economics

- Role of the Government

### **Science Standards:**

#### Science in Personal and Social Perspective

- Personal and community health
- Natural resources
- Environmental quality
- Science and technology in local, national and global challenges

### **Author’s Biography**

Terri Carta was born and raised in Southern California in a family that spent a lot of time in the mountains, deserts and beaches of the region. She grew up with a deep appreciation for the natural world and realized that she had a passion for passing this appreciation along to others. After graduating with a B.S. in Environmental Biology from San Diego State University, Ms. Carta served two years as a natural resources management and community education volunteer with the Peace Corps in Guinea, West Africa. Currently, Ms. Carta manages education programs in Central Park, New York, and teaches environmental science at a local college. She holds a Master’s Degree in Ecological Teaching and Learning from Lesley University/Audubon Expedition Institute and is interested in fostering connections between people and the natural and social environments on which we all depend.