

Grade 8 Life Orientation Worksheet

The constitution on healthy environment

First read the following article.

Exercising South Africa's New Constitution to Reduce Pollution

One company has publicly committed to reducing SO₂ emissions by 80 per cent.

March 31, 1998

South Africa's new constitution promises each citizen a healthy environment, access to information and meaningful participation in government decision making. Attorneys at the Legal Resources Center (LRC) in Cape Town worked with the ELAW network to make sure these promises are more than just words on paper.



A refinery in South Africa

LRC represents residents of poor communities adjacent to four oil refineries. These citizens have suffered for years from pollution from the refineries. To negotiate with the refineries, LRC lawyers needed detailed technical information about the refineries' processes and pollutant releases. LRC requested this information from the Ministry of Environmental Affairs. Despite the new constitutional provision requiring public disclosure of this information, the Ministry initially declined, saying that the information was protected from public disclosure as "trade secrets." LRC prepared to go to court to enforce the constitution. To bolster the case, LRC asked ELAW advocates for court decisions from other countries that upheld citizens' right to information about pollutant releases.

Through the ELAW network, LRC received legal precedents from Hungary, Bangladesh, the United Kingdom, Australia, Peru, and the U.S. Faced with this information and LRC's pressure, the government reversed course and LRC obtained the information it needed. LRC then called on the ELAW network for help analysing the information and developing support for substantial reductions in pollution emissions. LRC is making progress: one company has publicly committed to reducing SO₂ emissions by 80 per cent and LRC lawyers are working with the refinery to achieve far more than this — developing a comprehensive

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agreement on safety issues both inside and outside the refinery and bringing SO₂ levels down another 10 per cent to U.S. standards.

LRC hopes to secure a binding and enforceable commitment from the refineries to reduce pollution. With help from ELAW, LRC has already scored an impressive victory: LRC has given life to South Africa's new constitutional guarantee and given citizens access to the information they need to secure a healthy environment and environmental justice in South Africa in the years to come.

For more information about this ELAW Impact, please contact: Legal Resources Centre, P.O. Box 5227, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa.

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Now divide into groups of about 4 people per group and discuss the following issues:

1. What environmental health issue is being discussed in this case study?
2. What is being done about this problem?
3. What more do you think can be done about this problem?
4. What is the effect of the pollution problem?

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Your teacher will assess your participation in the group discussion using the following checklist.

Checklist for observation of group discussion			
Name:		Date:	
	Criteria: Does the learner:	Yes	No
1	Wait for a pause before s/he interrupts a speaker?		
2	Interrupt a speaker politely?		
3	Show evidence of having understood the concept of environmental health?		
4	Keep to the topic under discussion?		
5	Disagree with points politely and constructively?		
6	Give reasons to support alternative points of view?		
7	Make points clearly using appropriate vocal volume?		
8	Make eye contact when speaking?		
9	Use body language appropriately?		
10	Make notes when applicable to remember points made by others?		
2 marks for every 'yes' answer: 20 total			

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Suggested Solutions

Question number	Possible marks	Solution
1	20	See checklist in Appendix of Assessment Tools.

Appendix of assessment tools

Checklist to assess participation in the group discussion

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