

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Gulf Oil Spill Could Be Most Damaging in History 05/04/2010

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/jan-june10/oil_04-30.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.]

INITIATING QUESTIONS

- 1. Where is the Gulf of Mexico? Which states have coastline on the Gulf?**
- 2. Where does the electricity in your home come from?**
- 3. How do oil companies extract oil and gasoline from the ground?**

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. What caused the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico?

ANSWER

An explosion at an oil drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico off the U.S. coast created a leak that is threatening wildlife, beaches and ecosystems near the mouth of the Mississippi River.

2. How big is the oil slick?

ANSWER

An estimated 210,000 gallons of thick black crude oil from holes drilled into the ocean bed are leaking into Gulf waters every day.

3. How does an in-situ burn work?

ANSWER

Using a method known as an in-situ burn, workers attempted to corral and set aflame large sections of the slick in a controlled way by gathering oil in 500-foot fireproof booms, or floating barriers, and bringing it to a certain thickness before burning it.

4. Why does some of the oil fail to burn?

ANSWER

Their work has been thwarted by high winds and the fact that 97 percent of the oil has been mixed with water, making it too thin to burn.

5. Name at least one method being employed to stop the oil.

ANSWER

Underwater robots also have been used to try to stop the oil leak at its source, but those attempts have been unsuccessful so far.

BP is also using special chemicals to try to disperse the oil as it comes out of the ground, and Air Force planes have been dispatched to spray similar chemicals onto the slick from above.

More than 1,000 people and numerous boats and aircraft are involved in the cleanup effort, which largely involves corralling the spill within thousands of feet of floating booms.

6. Why are birds particularly threatened by the spill?

ANSWER

Shorebirds are among the most vulnerable animals in an oil spill, since the crude oil coats their feathers, disabling their natural protection against extreme cold and heat.

7. How will this oil spill affect fisherman?

ANSWER

Fishermen are especially concerned since Gulf coast waters are rich fishing grounds teeming with shrimp, crabs and other staples of the seafood industry

Officials declared an emergency shrimp harvest so fishermen could gather as much shrimp as possible before the oil arrived. However, shrimpers are anticipating massive losses and have filed a class-action (group) lawsuit against BP to recover their lost income.

8. How many offshore oil rigs are currently in operation in the Gulf of Mexico?

ANSWER

There are currently 90 operating rigs in U.S. Gulf waters, searching for oil and natural gas.

9. What was the Exxon Valdez?

ANSWER

The largest oil spill to date in U.S. waters was in March 1989, when the massive oil tanker Exxon Valdez ran aground in the waters of Prince William Sound off the Alaska coast, spilling about 11 million gallons of oil. Alaskan wildlife and shoreline ecosystems suffered greatly as a result.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. What surprises you most about this story? What did you learn about the oil industry?

2. Following the spill, White House senior advisor David Axelrod said that all new offshore drilling efforts will be suspended until the slick has been cleaned up and its cause has been thoroughly investigated; do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?

3. Does it surprise you that it is so hard to clean up the oil? Can you think of new ways to clean up the oil?

4. Should the Louisiana fisherman sue BP? Why or why not?

5. Who should be held responsible for the oil spill and clean up?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.