



Contemporary Issues CONTENT GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

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**Education &
Children's Programs**

AUTHORS:

Brock J. Brown, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Geography Department, Texas State University-San Marcos

Michal L. LeVasseur, Ph.D., Executive Director, National Council for Geographic Education, Jacksonville State University, Alabama

Overview

The **geographic perspective** and geographic skills can be utilized to enhance our understanding of the contemporary issues in Africa, or in any region. A geographic perspective prompts us to consider the issue in its spatial context, how it came to be an issue in that location, how it links to other places and people, and what the effects of the issue are on particular places and people.

As educators we can help our students add the spatial and ecological dimension to an understanding of contemporary issues. Infusing contemporary issues into the curriculum can add relevance and timeliness to concepts being studied. Using the geographic perspective, one may explore contemporary issues such as these in Africa.

Poverty/employment
(Example: Persistent poverty in South Africa)

Warfare/conflict/refugees
(Example: Genocide in Darfur, Sudan)

Desertification
(Example: Sudano-Sahelian region)

Deforestation
(Example: Rain forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)

Wildlife conservation
(Example: Protecting Madagascar's biodiversity)

Access to clean water
(Example: Rural water projects in Ghana)

Education and literacy
(Example: Lifelong education in Botswana)



Children from poor families sometimes work. (Benin)

Urbanization
(Example: Nigerian cities)

Corruption / government
(Examples: Multipartyism in Kenya, corruption under Haile Selassie in Ethiopia)

Status of women
(Examples: Female circumcision in Guinea; entrepreneurship and business training in Nigeria)

Wildlife and land conservation (Examples: Conservation efforts throughout the heartland of Africa include Kilimanjaro and the Maasai Steppe; Tanzania, Zambia, and Botswana have officially protected more than 30 percent of their land)

Involving students in a geographic inquiry provides an engaging way for students to practice developing skills of inquiry, collecting, organizing and evaluating different forms of information, and presenting the answers to their questions.

Key Terms in this Guide

Carrying Capacity – the number of people the Earth can support as a whole, or can support in a specific region

Culture – the highly integrated, total way of life for a group of people; it is learned; it forms an integrated whole; and it is unique to humans

Ecological perspective – the view one has when he or she explores the relationships between the physical and human environments

Geographic perspective – the perspective used by geographers when they use all available data and tools to first assess spatial distributions, then investigate the underlying spatial processes responsible for the observable spatial distributions, and finally make spatial predictions and decisions about how best to preserve or change the distributions

Migration – movement of humans or animals from one place to another; it is the predominant process that contributed to the spread of human populations over Earth at the global scale and is evident in the population distribution of today at the regional and local scale; it contributes to cultural diffusion and influences demographics, ethnicity, economics, culture, and social characteristics

Population – people; the term implies human need and economic demand for resources

Refugee – a person who flees his place of habitual residence to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality, as in times of war, political oppression, environmental destruction, or religious persecution

Region – a human construct that attempts to generalize complex physical and cultural spatial distributions so that they can be understood (regions can be formal or functional; definitions for cultural regions only given here)

- **Formal Cultural Region** – represents the spatial distribution of cultural traits
- **Functional Cultural Region** – represents the deliberate organization of space to accomplish some function

Resources – something defined as valuable by a group of people; the value of a resource can be *created* by a culture, and the value of a resource can be *destroyed*, as well

Spatial distribution – the distribution in Earth space of anything that exists and can be observed and mapped; not random but due to spatial processes

- Can be natural/physical such as precipitation, temperature, or soil
- Can be cultural, such as language, religion, or gender equality
- Can also be the result of humans interacting with the environment, for example, soil erosion, deforestation, or habitat loss due to urban sprawl

Key Terms in this Guide con't.

Spatial process – an underlying process responsible for the way something is distributed over Earth space

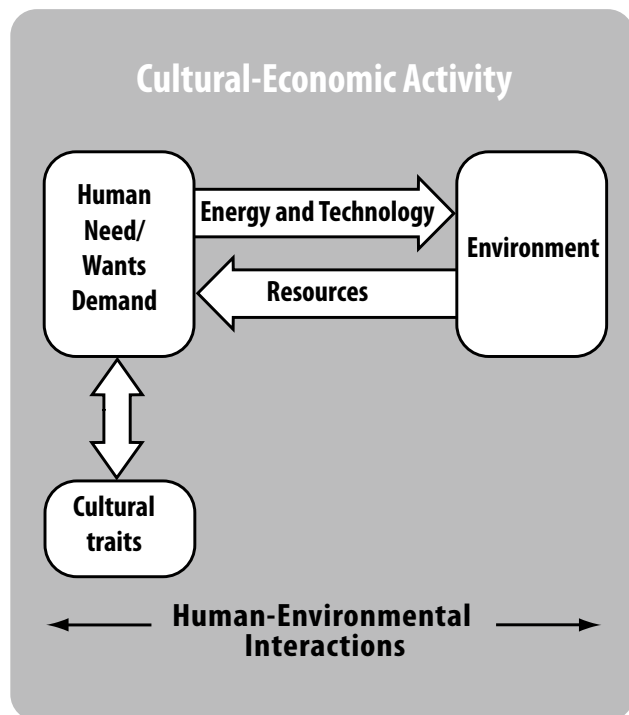
- Spatial distributions in the natural/physical environment are due to spatial processes; energy and matter working in the Earth's physical system
- Cultural patterns are not random, either, but due to spatial processes, primarily innovation/invention or more likely spatial diffusion

Technology – the use of tools, energy, and human creativity to identify and extract resources from the environment that people need, want, and can generate demand for in the global economy; the ability of a group of people to use energy and technology to extract resources from the environment is closely tied to standard of living

Population Change in Africa

An issue of significance for a number of African countries is the pattern of population change. **Human migration** affects the distribution of population and the size of the population in particular areas. Population sizes and distributions also change in response to demographic characteristics of the population, such as birth rate, death rate, rate of natural increase, fertility rate, etc. Each of these characteristics has a **spatial distribution** and can help us to understand the dynamics of population increase in Africa. The **ecological perspective** can help us understand the impact that population growth has on such issues as settlement patterns, land use, food security, and the availability of **resources**.

As humans interact with the environment to extract resources, they impact and modify existing spatial distributions and underlying **spatial processes** of the environment. The number of people and the length of time they are in an area influence the degree to which they will impact it. More recently, the level of **technology** a group of people possesses has become one of the most important variables in determining the degree and “spatial extent” that people impact the environment. Over the past few thousand years, human developments in technology have increased our ability to extract resources. This has, in turn, increased the number of humans that the planet can support, or the **carrying capacity**. It is believed that the Earth’s population 2,000 years ago was about 250-300 million people. Today it is about 6.5 billion. The level of technology 2,000 years ago would not have supported today’s population. Advances in technology have expanded the carrying capacity and made it possible for so many people to live on the planet.

**Key facts:**

- Rapid population growth is causing human need to exceed resources in some areas of Africa.
 - a. The area around Lake Victoria, in East Africa, has a significantly higher population density than most of the rest of Africa due to the wealth of natural resources and economic benefits.
 - b. More forests and grasslands are being converted to agricultural land use in order to produce food for growing populations.
 - c. Expansion of domesticated animal populations has created tension over land use for pasture, agriculture, and wildlife habitat.
 - d. Land use patterns coupled with semiarid soils and drought have expanded the process of desertification in Africa, especially in the Sahel region.
 - e. More land, including prime agricultural land, is being converted for urban use as the rural-to-urban migration rate increases in Africa.
- The migration of refugees within countries and between countries is changing some population distribution patterns.
- Urbanization is increasing as a result of the rural-to-urban migration. At the present trend, half the population of Africa may be urban by 2025.
- Tendency toward urban primacy, in which one city is dominant in a country and at least three times larger in population than the next largest city.

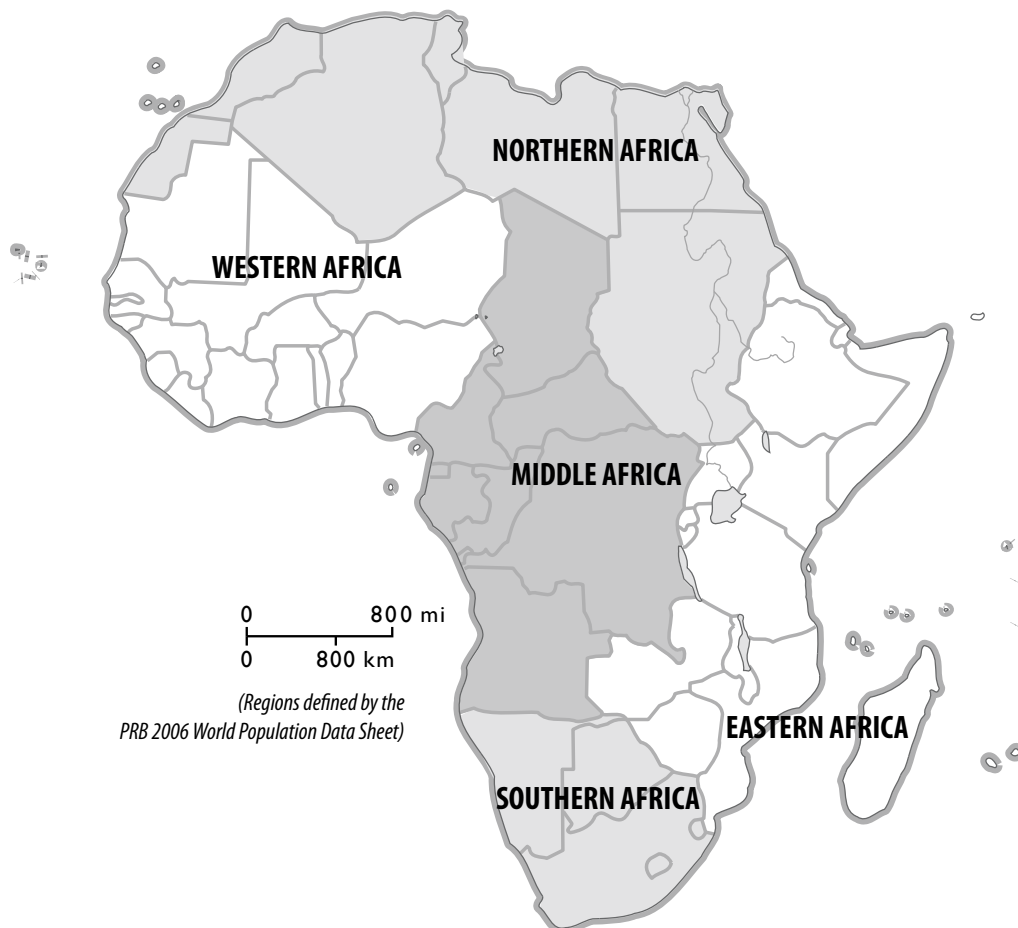
Roots of Conflict in Africa

Religion and language (the spatial distributions of which form **formal cultural regions**) are two of the most central elements of **culture**. Spatial distributions of religion and language are strong indicators of the distribution of culture. As a result of imperialism, African political boundaries are often incompatible with the spatial distribution of language and/or religion. In other words, cultural groups are dissected by political boundaries. These unnatural divisions are often a source of tension and conflict.

The map below, "Africa: Political Boundaries (Functional Cultural Regions)," indicates political boundaries of five regions of Africa (**functional cultural regions**). Compare this map with thematic maps showing language and/or religion. (The spatial distribution of an ethnic and/or national group can often be illustrated by the distribution of a language, or of a religion.)

Are there examples of where ethnic/national groups (**formal cultural regions**), as indicated by the spatial distribution of *language*, are dissected by political boundaries? Are there examples of where the spatial distribution of *religion* that indicate that political boundaries dissect ethnic/national groups? If so, what contemporary conflicts might exist as a result of these incompatible distributions?

AFRICA: Political Boundaries (Functional Cultural Regions)



HIV/AIDS in Africa

One of the most pressing issues for human life is the challenge of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. This epidemic affects at least 40 million people now living with HIV. While global in scope, the region most severely impacted is sub-Saharan Africa. A recent publication of the Population Reference Bureau, *The Global Challenge of HIV and AIDS* (March 2006), reports that an estimated 4.9 million people were newly infected with HIV in 2005. Of this number, 95 percent of them lived in sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, or Asia.

The United Nations and the World Health Organization recognize the Africa epidemic of HIV and AIDS as a highly varied outbreak across the continent. Initially, HIV spread in a band from West Africa across to the Indian Ocean, beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It then began moving to the southern countries, where it is now most prevalent. As of 2004, South Africa had the most cases in the world, and Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland had the highest percentage of people who were HIV positive. According to the recent 2006 UNAIDS report, India's 5.7 million cases have surpassed South Africa's 5.5 million for the highest number of people living with HIV in the world.

On the next page are some online resources that contain data about the spatial distribution of HIV and AIDS. The formats in which these data are presented vary, but represent some of the forms in which you and your students are most likely to encounter information. It is the data, organized and analyzed with a geographic perspective, which will enhance understanding of any contemporary issue.

As you review data, ask yourself the following geographic questions.

- What geographic questions do these data raise?
- What are the implications for a spatial distribution and underlying processes that explain those distributions?
- What is the impact on cultural and physical systems of different regions and countries?
- What is the impact on the demographic characteristics and diversity of populations within specific regions or countries?
- What other data would help your understanding of the issue?
- What predictions would you make for the future of selected regions or countries?

Online Resources: Spatial Distribution of HIV and AIDS

AIDS in Africa: Epidemic Map

<http://www.aidsinfrica.net/map.php>

Interactive map shows current levels of HIV prevalence by country, and spread since 1970 (also GDP per capita, population density, literacy rate, fertility rate, and highways and mobility)

AIDS in Africa: People Charts

http://www.aidsinfrica.net/people_charts.php

Animated charts, graphs, and diagrams that illustrate statistics and social dimensions of AIDS in Africa

BBC News: The global spread of HIV

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/africa/03/aids_debate/html/default.stm

Interactive map shows spread of epidemic from 1986 to 2001

U.S. Census Bureau: HIV/AIDS Surveillance Data Base

www.census.gov/ipc/www/hivaidsd.html

Tables and maps of compiled data on HIV/AIDS in developing countries. (Some terms may be unfamiliar. *Seroprevalence*, *HIV I*, and *HIV II* are defined by the *AIDSinfo* Glossary, at <http://www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/>. Kid-friendly definitions of high-risk and low-risk behavior can be found online at KidsHealth, at http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/stds/std_hiv.html.)

Activity: Geographic Perspective of Contemporary Issues

Materials:

- **Population Reference Bureau: 2006 World Population Data Sheet (PDF)** (one per group)
<http://www.prb.org/pdf06/06WorldDataSheet.pdf>
- Student atlas of world geography (one per group)
- Paper and pen/pencil
- Large newsprint
- Color markers for newsprint

Step 1. Working in small groups, students should prepare a list of contemporary issues relative to Africa. Each group should write their list on newsprint so that it can be posted to share.

Step 2. Select one or two issues from the list created in Step 1 for the groups to discuss. On another piece of newsprint, each group should write its issue(s), and below that write the following three questions, leaving room for answers:

- What is the geographic question that addresses the issue?
- What data is required to answer the question?
- How could you organize and analyze the data?

Step 3. Each group should then answer the geographic questions. Students may consult the PRB World Population Data Sheet or a student atlas. Groups should then write their answers on the newsprint.

Step 4. Post the newsprint for the class to review.

(For background information about geographic questions, see the **Geographic Perspective: Content Guide for Educators PDF**, at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/guides/geogpguide.pdf>.)

Online Resources

Contemporary Issues in Africa Content Guide: Online Resources

RELATED LINKS:

National Geographic Guides for Educators: The Geographic Perspective

Written for educators, these National Geographic content guides offer background on and real-world examples of the geographic perspective, and how it can be applied across the curriculum.

Geographic Perspective: Content Guide for Educators (PDF)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/guides/geogpguide.pdf>

Examples of ways educators can apply the geographic perspective across the curriculum to enhance students' examination of complex issues that arise from human interaction with the environment

Africa: Physical Geography Content Guide for Educators (PDF)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/guides/physicalafricaguide.pdf>

Explores ways of teaching physical geography—specifically, of Africa—to students, including location, topography, climate, vegetation, and rivers. Developed for *Geography Action!* 2006: Africa.

Africa: Human Geography Content Guide for Educators (PDF)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/guides/humanafricaguide.pdf>

By exploring the cultural landscape of a place, educators can help students understand how people learn and integrate culture—something unique to humans. Developed for *Geography Action!* 2006: Africa.

Africa: Contemporary Issues Content Guide for Educators (this guide)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/guides/contempafricaguide.pdf>

How educators can use the geographic perspective to infuse numerous kinds of contemporary issues—in this instance, issues in Africa—into their curricula. Developed for *Geography Action!* 2006: Africa.

Africa Multidisciplinary Educator Guide (PDF)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/guides/multidafricaguide.pdf>

This guide offers K–12 educators dozens of resources for teaching about Africa across the curriculum when something new and interesting is needed. Grouped into four grades bands, the guide lists lesson plans, interactive features, and more that can be used to teach science, social studies, Language Arts, art, and more. Developed for *Geography Action!* 2006: Africa.

Brock Brown's Geographical Summary of Earth as a Natural/Physical Environmental System and Humans Interacting with the System (PDF)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/guides/geogsummary.pdf>

This thought-provoking essay explores the Earth's dynamic energy/matter system and how humans impact that system through the use of technology. Dr. Brown is an Associate Professor of Geography at Texas State University—San Marcos.

BBC News: Country Profiles

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm

History, politics, and economic background of countries and territories; background on key international institutions

CIA: The World Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>

Maps and country profiles with information about location, geographic coordinates, climate, terrain, land use, irrigated land, and much more

My Wonderful World

<http://www.mywonderfulworld.org>

Give kids the power of global knowledge with resources from this National Geographic-led campaign—backed by a coalition of major partners—to expand geographic learning in school, in the home, and in the community.

National Geographic on Africa

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/africa/>

Explore Africa with classroom resources, interactive features, photographs, Web sites for kids, and more.

National Geographic EdNet

<http://www.ngsednet.org/>

The National Geographic free online site for educators—a one-stop shop for education news, resources, discussion, and more

National Geographic EdNet: Classroom Companion Africa Resources

http://www.ngsednet.com/community/resource_uploads/250_08172005_2891.pdf

Comprehensive list of National Geographic resources on Africa

National Geographic: *Geography Action!* 2006: Africa in 3-D

<http://nationalgeographic.com/geographyaction>

National Geographic's annual K-12 conservation and awareness program focused on "Africa in 3-D" in 2006, the first of a five-year, round-the-world curriculum series.

National Geographic Online

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com>

Photos, videos, daily news, interactive features, maps, world music, and more, as well as resources for educators and kids

National Geographic: People and Places: Africa

http://www3.nationalgeographic.com/places/continents/continent_africa.html

Regional and country profiles, fast facts, maps, flags, music, photos, news and many other related features

University of Pennsylvania African Studies Center

<http://www.africa.upenn.edu>

Up-to-date resources for K–12 teachers include lessons, country pages, images, maps and flags, and links to sites about African anthropology, population, women’s studies, and more.

AIDS IN AFRICA:**National Geographic News: African Women Assert Themselves in Fight Against AIDS**

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/01/0117aids.html>

UNAIDS: 2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic: Chapter 2—Overview (PDF)

http://data.unaids.org/pub/GlobalReport/2006/2006_GR_CH02_en.pdf

A yearly overview of AIDS worldwide with text, graphs, and tables that illustrate issues, statistics, and trends in Africa by region (pp. 10–23). (This 43–page PDF is 4MB.)

UNAIDS: Sub-Saharan Africa AIDS Fact sheet 2006 (PDF)

http://data.unaids.org/pub/GlobalReport/2006/200605-FS_SubSaharanAfrica_en.pdf

UN fact sheet lists current AIDS statistics and developing trends

***The Washington Post*: Special Report: AIDS in Africa**

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/world/issues/aidsinafrica/index.html>

“Special Report” includes articles, news, commentaries, charts and graphs, more

OTHER CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN AFRICA:**International Crisis Group: Crisis in Darfur**

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2700&l=1>

Reports, news, and analysis of current situation and options for resolution; maps, geographical information, and photos; more

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: Africa MegaFlyover—Charting the Last Wild Places on Earth

<http://www7.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/mega-flyover/>

Fueled by a desire for conservation, biologist and explorer Michael Fay undertook an aerial survey to examine the impact of human activity on the wilderness.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: Shattered Sudan

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0302/feature2/>

An oil pipeline fuels the unforgiving heart of a seemingly endless war. It may also be a means to peace.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: Somalia—A Failed State?

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0207/feature3/index.html>

A civilian army of entrepreneurs and expatriates offers hope in this East African nation, bloodied by warring clans.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: Without Borders—Uniting Africa’s Wildlife Reserves

http://www7.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/data/2001/09/01/html/ft_20010901.1.html

In southern Africa transfrontier reserves hold the promise of restoring ecosystems, bolstering tourism, and creating trust among nations of a war-torn continent.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: Zimbabwe—A Land Possessed

<http://magma.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0308/feature5/>

With the onset of land reform in Zimbabwe, whites lost farms, blacks lost jobs, and the country that once fed much of southern Africa lost the means to feed itself.

National Geographic News: Africa Through the Lens of National Geographic News

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2001/07/0731_africafest.html

National Geographic News: Can Central Africa’s Rain Forests Live With Logging?

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2004/11/1118_041118_logging_central_africa.html

National Geographic News: Lions Vs. Farmers: Peace Possible?

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/07/0716_030716_lions.html

Rainforestweb.org: Rainforest Region: Africa

http://www.rainforestweb.org/Rainforest_Regions/Africa/

Information portal for online resources of rain forests throughout Africa

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN AFRICA: RELATED LESSON PLANS:**EDSITEment: Women in Africa: Tradition and Change (Multiple Grades)**

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=307

Students gain insight into the lives of some black women in sub-Saharan Africa by adopting a perspective that is in part traditional and in part postcolonial.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Protecting Africa’s Wildlife (Grades K–2)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/14/gk2/africawildlife.html>

Students consider how people affect the natural environment in their home area and in Africa. They learn about two African habitats (savanna and rain forest) and some of the animals that live there.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Africa’s Struggle with AIDS (Grades 6–8)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/01/g68/africaaids68.html>

Students come to understand the enormity of the impact of AIDS on the population of Africa by comparing the effect there with its effect on the population of the world in general, especially the U.S.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Seeing the Human Impact on Africa: What Can You Learn From a Plane? (Grades 6–8)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/01/g68/africaplane.html>

Students analyze several maps of Africa to see where the greatest levels of human impact can be observed. They look at photographs from different parts of Africa showing both its human and natural landscapes, and consider what these images might look like from the air.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—AIDS in Africa I: The Scope of the Problem (Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/01/g912/africaaidsI.html>

Students search for data related to the discrepancy between the impact of AIDS on people in sub-Saharan Africa and on people in the U.S. and determine mathematically the relative impact of AIDS on Africa versus its impact on the U.S.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—AIDS in Africa II: More Than Sympathy (Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/01/g912/africaaidsII.html>

This lesson focuses on why the disastrous numbers surrounding the AIDS epidemic in Africa exist.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Darfur and the Janjaweed (Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/03/g912/africadarfur.html>

Students learn about the conflict between the people of Darfur and the Janjaweed militia, its historical and religious roots, its impact on neighboring countries, and the international response.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—A Geographic Perspective on Africa (Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/18/g912/gpafrika4.html>

Introduces students to the geographic perspective and gives them the opportunity to practice using this perspective by analyzing current issues facing Africa

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Geographic Technology Assisting African Conservation (Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/01/g912/geotech.html>

Students study the impact of human population growth by conducting a study of its influence on Africa. They analyze the role that geographic technology currently plays in mitigating population growth’s negative effects.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Human Impacts in the African Rain Forest: What Can We Do? (Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/14/g912/fayhuman.html>

Students examine the human impacts on the rain forest as well as some of the underlying causes for current environmental threats to the African rain forests.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Sustainable Development and Africa’s Wildlife Reserves (Globalization 101; Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/16/g912/sustdevafrica.html>

Students will learn about globalization and sustainable development in Africa. They will read about sustainable development projects in Africa involving the creation of transfrontier wildlife reserves, differentiate between the competing interests involved in developing wildlife reserves, analyze the role of globalization in sustainable development projects, and debate the merits of a wildlife reserve project in Africa.

National Geographic: Xpeditions Lesson—Two Threats to African Wildlife (Grades 9–12)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/18/g912/africathreats.html>

Students investigate two of the most serious threats to African wildlife today: habitat destruction and hunting/poaching.

Authors:

Brock J. Brown, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Geography Department, Texas State University–San Marcos

Michal L. LeVasseur, Ph.D., Executive Director, National Council for Geographic Education, Jacksonville State University, Alabama

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