

# Hot Polar Debate



## Objective

Students will research available literature for factual information and logically argue a point of view. They will demonstrate real-life decision making processes and evaluate outcomes.

## Materials

- a copy of player cards on page 2
- access to resource materials

## Background

Arctic land and the surrounding waters hold vast mineral resources—coal, natural gas, oil, gold, and stocks of fishes. During the past 40 years, humans have begun to mine, drill, and collect these resources for use in other areas of the country or world. With increased development comes the possibility of oil spills, pollution, excessive silting of rivers from mining, and the decrease of fish stocks. As the human population continues to grow, individuals must make wise decisions about how to conserve resources to gain the best long-term use.

## Action

1. Divide students into four groups. Each group will represent a different faction in an environmental issue. The issue at hand is the wise use of natural resources.
  - Group One is the local townspeople.
  - Group Two is a team of conservation specialists who have been studying resource management.
  - Group Three is a group of industrialists who want to use the natural resources.
  - Group Four represents fishermen who use the area.
2. Copy and distribute the player cards to the student groups. Familiarize yourself with the scenario by reading all four player cards. Give the student groups time to familiarize themselves with the situation. Students can gather additional information from books, websites, magazines, newspapers, and journals from special interest groups.
3. When all groups are ready, stage a town council meeting. Groups should choose one spokesperson to present group views. Mediate between the groups. At the end of the meeting, have townspeople vote on the appropriate action.
4. After the activity is over, discuss how conservation issues are complex problems that affect people as well as animals.

# Hot Polar Debate



Scenario: A small town of 500 people live along the Alaskan coast. The area is rich in oil and natural gas but not easily accessible. Removal of oil and gas will mean building roads and level work areas that would destroy many acres of wilderness. Some industries want to develop the area. The townspeople who own the land must decide what is best—to begin development or to find another source of revenue to help keep the town alive.

## LOCAL TOWNSPEOPLE

You live in a small town of only 500 people. Most people earn a living by fishing in-shore or hunting in the local mountains. Most young people who grow up here move to bigger cities to find jobs. Your town is slowly dying. Without another source of income, most people will move away in 20 years. You and your friends agree that you would like a better life.

## CONSERVATION SPECIALISTS

You and your team have been studying the area for many years. You know the forests hold many different animals—deer, fox, bear—along with oil and gas deposits deep underground. You have been assigned to find alternative ways for the townspeople to find income. You want to find a balance between use of the natural resources and impact on environment. In general, you see industrialists as money grabbers who do not care about the environment or the townspeople. Your team has found out that the resources will be depleted in 20 years if development continues at its present pace. The ecological damage from mining and drilling will be expensive to fix.

## INDUSTRIALISTS

Your company sees many opportunities to mine and drill for oil in the town's local mountains. Your field experts confirm that there are deposits of oil and natural gas, although they can not tell exactly how much. Your company is willing to begin development. If successful, the money generated from the oil sales will double the company's profit. Company employees also will earn big bonuses. To help convince townspeople, your company is willing to pay for a new indoor recreation center. The center will create 20 new jobs and allow high school athletes to train here instead of in the city. Your company will also pay the town \$1,000 per acre for leasing the land.

## FISHERMEN

You feel the town can make a turnaround with traditional activities. You feel fishing will improve in the coming years and more young people will stay to help fish. If the mining and drilling is conducted in the mountains, the rivers will carry more silt. The silt will clog the bay and fish will die.