A Place in Time: Lesson Plan

By Greg Hinze

This exercise is intended to give students an opportunity actually to do environmental history themselves as a way of synthesizing temporal and landscape changes in a specific environment.

The guidelines are as follows:

1. Pick a particular place, preferably one that is well-known to you, either from your home or from your travels
2. Take a long, careful look at the place and try to see it with unfamiliar eyes, taking nothing for granted but looking at everything you see there as if you’d never seen it before.
3. Ask how the things you see might have come to be there. Did the lives of earlier inhabitants leave traces that can still be seen?
4. Research the history of the place, and look for changes in the environment and land-use patterns. If applicable, consider the environmental footprint and legacy of Native peoples, early explorers, miners, ranchers, smallholder farmers, agribusiness, government, etc. on your place. Look for layers of civilization, culture, and settlement patterns that have occurred at your place over time.

Then, compose and present a 30-minute PowerPoint presentation on your place and share what you have discovered.
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Learning Outcomes

1.) Achieve a basic understanding of the field of environmental history, its goals and methods.

2.) Recognize and understand how factors such as class, ethnicity, region, and culture have shaped the way that people understand and interact with the world around them.

3.) Critically analyze the connections between environmental change, economic activity, and social structures over time.

4.) Effectively communicate various ideas about environmental history in a presentation format.