Teaching Blockadia

How the Movement Against Fossil Fuels Is Changing the World

By Bill Bigelow, Adam Sanchez, and Tim Swinehart

THESE DAYS, IT SEEMS that no place is safe. When we wrote this role play, each of us was living in Portland, Oregon—hardly ground zero for fossil fuel extraction. And yet, fossil fuels have become part of our physical and political landscape. There are still three proposals to bring millions of tons of coal every year down the Columbia River, by barge and rail, to be exported to Asia from Oregon and Washington. Trains filled with highly explosive Bakken Field oil from North Dakota regularly snake through the Portland metropolitan area, and one oil project alone—Tesoro Savage in Vancouver, Washington—would ship up to 360,000 barrels of crude oil every day and require at least four daily mile-and-a-half-long oil-only trains to keep the spigot open. Multiple proposals are still alive to export liquefied natural gas, as well as one of the largest industrial development projects in Portland's history, to export propane.

Joe Brusky

People's Climate March, September 24, 2014, New York City.

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One of 13 activists suspended under the St. Johns Bridge displays a banner. The climbers blocked the Shell-leased icebreaker MSV Fennica *from passing underneath the bridge on its way to join Shell's drilling fleet.*

The paradoxical feature of the fossil fuel industry's imperial ambitions is that the more that communities are threatened or affected, the more likely these communities are to be drawn into the fight against fossil fuels and for greener alternatives. As we write, 13 Greenpeace activists hang from the St. Johns Bridge over the Willamette River in Portland, and the river itself is filled with "kayaktivists"—water-borne demonstrators—all seeking to block a Shell Oil icebreaker, the *Fennica*, attempting to make its way to the Arctic to help Shell drill for oil in the Chukchi Sea.

In her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, Naomi Klein dubs this growing resistance "Blockadia." She writes:

> *What unites these increasingly interconnected pockets of resistance is the sheer ambition of the mining and fossil fuel companies: the fact that in their quest for high-priced commodities and higher-risk "unconventional" fuels, they are pushing relentlessly into countless new territories, regardless of the impact on the local ecology . . . .*
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> *What these campaigns [against fossil fuel extraction] are discovering is that while it's next to impossible to win a direct fight against the fossil fuel companies on their home turf, the chances of victory greatly increase when the battleground extends into a territory where the industry is significantly weaker—places where nonextractive ways of life still flourish and where residents (and politicians) are less addicted to petro and coal dollars. And as the corroded tentacles of extreme energy reach out in all directions like a giant metal spider, the industry is pushing into a whole lot of those kinds of places . . . .*
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> *As resistance to the extractive industries gains ground along these far-flung limbs, it is starting to spread back to the body of carbon country—lending new courage to resist even in those places the fossil fuel industry thought it had already conquered.*

And that's the story of this role play. Much of the curriculum we had previously written and taught on climate change focused on helping students understand global warming as a political and economic issue rooted in the system of global capitalism. We sought to challenge students to analyze the commonplace notion that global warming can be solved through technical-scientific fixes or individual lifestyle choices. But we found that for our students—and for ourselves—identifying the root of climate change in the political economy of capitalism can be demoralizing. Changing our light bulbs, riding our bikes more often, or taking shorter showers, though woefully inadequate for confronting climate change, are solutions that are appealingly easy for all of us who want to see a future for the planet. Yet if the solution to addressing climate change is to

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Thirteen Greenpeace activists suspended under Portland's St. Johns Bridge block the Shell-leased icebreaker MSV Fennica *from passing underneath the bridge on its way to join Shell's drilling fleet in the Arctic.*

radically change the political and economic structure of society, as Klein argues in *This Changes Everything*, then we need to explore the actions that will move us toward that systemic shift.

So rather than beginning with the impact of the climate crisis, and the enormity of fossil fuel extraction and pollution, this activity focuses on those who are fighting back and working for alternatives. One aspect of Klein's work that provides us hope is the intricate web of successful local struggles against the fossil fuel industry she highlights. In the role play, we wanted to introduce our students to several of the organizations involved in these battles and challenge students to imagine the power of uniting these disparate struggles. Students assume the roles of diverse communities and activist groups throughout the world and learn about the impact of fossil fuels in each of their regions, how they are responding, and finally how they might act in solidarity with one another.

We subtitle this activity "how the movement against fossil fuels is changing the world." No doubt, it's a radical, wildly hopeful statement. However, the science is unequivocal: In order to keep global temperature rise below two degrees Celsius—itself, a dangerous, inadequate target—we have to keep at least 80 percent of known fossil fuel reserves in the ground. So if we are to live with the expectation of planetary survival, then we must act from that stance of radical hope. And our teaching needs to put students in the position where they can understand the importance of working for a fossil fuel-free world. They need to imagine themselves in the lives of grassroots activists.

Activity Overview:

Students are divided into six or seven groups, depending on the size of the class. Students receive roles of groups active in protecting their communities from the impact of fossil fuels. They read these and write interior monologues or autobiographies, exploring their histories and motivations. Representatives of each community organization rotate from group to group learning about what led each to take action, what they think the world should know about their struggle, and discussing how they can support each other's work. Students return to their groups to prepare speeches to deliver at a "Fossil Fuels for a Better World" conference, and create posters that illustrate the commonalities of their activism. Students then deliver these speeches and display their posters at a concluding "demonstration."

Materials Needed:

- Copies of each of the seven "Blockadia" roles—enough so that each student in a group gets a role sheet. (In smaller classes, we have used just six roles, skipping the "New Era Colorado" role. The target is to have at least four students per group, although the role play can be done with as few as 12 students.)
- Copies of "Blockadia Solidarity Meeting Questions"—enough for every student.
- Copies of the "Blockadia Solidarity Meeting" graphic organizer—enough for every student.
- Colored markers.
- Construction paper for making name placards—one for each group.
- Copies of "Fossil Fuels to the Rescue: A Manifesto"—enough for every student.
- Materials for students to make solidarity posters for the concluding demonstration—poster paper, crayons, colored markers, colored pencils.

Suggested procedure:

1. Explain the activity to students. They will be playing the roles of activists from around the world who in different ways are confronting the impact of fossil fuels. If you like, project the names of the different groups and say a few words about each group. Tell students that in their roles, they will meet and learn about the other groups and, finally, they will take part in demonstrations at a conference sponsored by the fossil fuel industry.
2. Divide students into six (or seven) groups and have them seat themselves in small circles throughout the classroom. Distribute roles to each group—note that individuals in each group receive the same role. As with any small-group activity, and especially role plays, it's helpful to have a range of skill levels in each group, and, if you know your students well, a diversity of students with different levels of comfort assuming the roles of other social groups and speaking to the whole class.
3. Ask students to read their roles carefully. Tell them to take notes especially on what led them to take action—what made them angry, what made them think that they could make a difference? It's helpful to tell students that shortly they will be imagining an individual in their group and writing an interior monologue or short autobiography. So tell students to note anything in the role that might help them to write these. (During this period, distribute placards to each group and a colored marker so that they can write the name of their group so that all students in groups can see who is who.)
4. When they have finished reading, ask students to talk in their small groups about what they like about the activism of people in their group: "What's cool about your group? What have they done that seems important, imaginative, or inspiring?"

5. Ask students to write from the perspective of an individual who is a member of their group. They can complete this as an interior monologue from this individual in the midst of an action initiated by this group. They can write about what angers, worries, or delights this individual. Alternatively, they can write this as a kind of personal story or autobiography about the events that led their person to join the work described in their role. Below are a couple of examples of student writing from when we led this activity with 9th graders at Madison High School in Portland, Oregon. It's often helpful to share one or two of these as prompts, to give students a sense of what is expected of them.

   Eleanore Clark wrote hers as an interior monologue from an activist with Swarthmore Mountain Justice in the midst of a demonstration in the college's administration building:

   Organizing, hosting panels, creating petitions, all our activism . . . it's hard to believe we're all still college students. Now, however, I have something else on my mind: I'm running out of air!

   I squeeze past the people around me and find an open space. Finally able to breathe again, I inhale greedily. Looking around, all I see are faces upon faces brimming with anticipation or anxiety. Letting out a smile, I reflect upon what brought us here.

   In the beginning, it was just a few of us, standing in West Virginia, surrounded by the rubble of the "overburden"—the stone left over from mountaintop coal removal sites. It was like an apocalyptic vision, a glimpse into what our own homes could become. It was a wake-up call, and when we came back to Swarthmore, we brought it with us.

   We resolved to do whatever we could to stop it. We remembered the old struggle against apartheid, calling for colleges to divest in South Africa-friendly companies. We realized we could do the same here; call for our college to divest.

   And now, that's what we're doing. Two hundred people, all students, all rallying for Swarthmore's divestment, are jam-packed in the administration building. I look at the crowd and smile. We've come so far. We are Swarthmore, and we won't let our college use our money for coal!

   Elizabeth Polyakov described the struggle in Sompeta, India. This excerpt from her "autobiography" describes her individual's growing awareness of the possible destruction of her village.

   I'd like to say that every struggle comes with losses, every win with some defeat. And when that defeat is someone's life, the struggle becomes more important. I wasn't expecting to be doing much more than harvesting, the summer of 2010, but fate called me in another direction.

   I was walking the cows to the stream when the trucks started rolling in. Because of my two-year education that got cut off due to my father's death, I could read pretty well. "Nagarjuna Construction Company." Because random trucks were always driving through our village, I quickly forgot about the trucks and continued on.

   That night, when I got home, my uncle was in the kitchen with my mother, clearly steamed about something. Not trying to eavesdrop too much, I heard the words "company," "pollute," and "swamp." Knowing enough about those words, I decided not to pry. I felt as if I would learn about the problem soon enough.

   At dinner, my uncle told me all about what was happening. Knowing it wouldn't sit well with the villagers, he was going to talk to the council. The council was a group of elders that were very wise and knew what to do . . .

6. In their small groups, ask students to read their interior monologue/autobiographies to one another. The idea is for students to use these to work themselves deeper into their roles. This is not an editing session,

just a chance for people in small groups to hear how others have interpreted their role, so students should concentrate on complimenting each other on their writing and noting common issues that came up in each piece. If there's time, you might ask for one or two volunteers to share their pieces with the whole class.

7. Distribute the student handout "Blockadia Solidarity Meeting Questions" to each student. Tell them that soon they'll be meeting with activists from other communities and organizations, but first it will be helpful for them to think about what they want to tell people in the other groups. Ask them to discuss these questions in their small groups and to try to reach consensus about their answers.

   What led you to take action? Think about what makes you angry. Think about what gives you hope. What is it that motivates you to make a difference?

   What should the world know about the issues that concern you and about how your activism has made a positive difference?

8. Ask students to choose half their group to be "travelers," who will rotate among other groups. If there is an odd number of students in a group, it doesn't matter whether the traveler or stay-at-home group is larger.

9. Distribute to all students the graphic organizer student handout "Blockadia Solidarity Meeting." Tell students that they will fill these out in conversation with representatives from other groups. This is a chance for members of both groups to learn from each other, so the home group should record information about the travelers and travelers record information about the home group. The final question on the handout—"What can you do to support this group's struggle?"—is meant to spark conversation between students in the two groups. Ask students to think concretely about how their group might work in ways that would support both their struggles. There are no right or wrong answers here, of course, so encourage students to be imaginative and to consider a range of possibilities.

10. Ask the travelers to stand and to rotate clockwise to the group closest to them. (There are only three rounds, as after three rotations, students in every group will have heard from representatives of all the other groups—albeit each student will not have heard from all groups.) The amount of time for each meeting will vary from class to class. Figure about eight minutes or so, depending on the time you are able to devote to the activity. You want to keep things moving, but you also want to leave sufficient time for substantial conversations. In these conversations, each group needs to hear from representatives of the other group, so halfway through the session, you might indicate that it's time to focus on the group that has not yet told its story.

11. After each round, ask the travelers to move clockwise to a new group and to repeat the process. After three rounds, ask all students to return to their home groups. Because not every student will have heard from all groups, ask students to share what they learned in their conversations with members of other communities and organizations. Ask them to focus especially on the last question, about how they can support other groups.

12. Tell students that, likely because the fossil fuel industry has been under so much criticism, it will be holding a major conference to promote their pro-fossil fuel message. They are calling this gathering "Fossil Fuels for a Better World." Your group, along with community activists throughout the world, will be holding demonstrations at the conference. In response, conference organizers have distributed "Fossil Fuels to the Rescue: A Manifesto." Distribute this reading to students, and ask them to read it carefully and critically. (Although in drafting this polemical "Manifesto," we intended it to generate lively critique from students, its content is by

no means a caricature of the industry's position. It draws heavily on research reported in scholar Michael T. Klare's 2015 TomDispatch.com article "Carbon Counterattack: How Big Oil Is Responding to the Anti-Carbon Moment." Klare demonstrates how, far from retreating in the face of increasing scientific evidence of the incompatibility of fossil fuels and a livable climate, "the major companies have gone on the offensive, extolling their contributions to human progress and minimizing the potential for renewables to replace fossil fuels in just about any imaginable future.")

13. As an alternative to distributing the "Manifesto" for students to read on their own, you might deliver this speech in role as a fossil fuel industry representative. Read it aloud dramatically and ask students to mark it up with questions and rebuttals. Afterward, allow students in small groups or pairs to discuss their questions, observations, and objections. Then answer—or dodge!—their questions in a press conference-style gathering. This takes a bit longer than simply distributing the speech for students to read and discuss in small groups, but it adds a playful and dramatic dimension to the role play.

14. After reading the "Manifesto"—whether in their small groups or in the larger group as a presentation—give students the concluding two-part assignment, appended to the "Manifesto":

    Your group has been asked to give a speech at the "Fossil Fuels for a Better World" protest. Collectively, write a short speech or spoken word poem that you will say to the crowd. Build off of your role, your meetings with other organizations, your interior monologue, and respond to the statement from the "Manifesto" released by the Fossil Fuels for a Better World Conference. You can choose a representative to deliver your speech/poem, or recite it as a group. Think about who your audience is. Is it the fossil fuel companies or is it the people from other organizations who have come to express their points of view?

    Design a poster to display at the protest that connects directly with the struggles of one or more of the other organizations that you met with. You can respond to the fossil fuels "Manifesto" and use powerful phrases from your role or your interior monologue, but also try to think about how your struggles are connected. Use both words and images.

15. As with any project for which a teacher has high hopes, it helps to give students some examples to prompt imagination and hard work. The special challenge of this two-part assignment is the solidarity component—the requirement that students' posters do not simply articulate an individual group's concerns, but also reflect how these issues connect to at least one other group's grievances or activism. In sharing prompts, we want to seed the creative process, yet not offer so many examples that we drown students in ideas.

    Some of the posters from classes we taught at Madison High School include:

    - Maps of India and Montana, each marred by coal and oil stains, linked by joined hands. The text reads: **Indians Unite Against the Enemies: Corporations**—acknowledging the shared struggles of ecoCheyenne and the Warriors of Sompeta.
    - "REMOVE CANCER NOT MOUNTAINS." The image shows mountains, dotted with coal, and trees below. An eraser is working to rub out the letters CANCER. This poster links the struggle of anti-coal activists in Haimen, China, with the Swarthmore students working on divestment from fossil fuels as a way to end mountaintop removal coal mining.
    - One poster includes the simple illustration of the Earth with the bold message: **OUR PLANET, OUR GRID,** linking the hopeful work of grid democracy activists in Hamburg and Colorado.

The class was a hive of activity during this period. Students wrote and practiced their speeches; others worked on their posters—all punctuated by laughter and shouts indicating a new *aha*.

16. Circle up the class for the "demonstration" speeches and poster-sharing. In our classes, the speeches focused on organizations' accomplishments and hopes. For example, the New Era Colorado group talked about its work securing the electricity grid in Boulder, as a way to shift the town away from coal:

    . . . We told the people of Boulder to stop, think, and fight back. We were able to vote out the energy company, Excel. We fought back and took back our electricity grid. Now, we are able to pay for what we need without any profit being made. Boulder electricity is now part of the community. No one can own our power plants. No one can control them. We control them. Our next step is to spread our story throughout the state, the country, and even the continent . . .

    The anti-coal activists of Haimen, China, ended their speech with an appeal to the other assembled groups: "We don't have to live this way. We still have hope. We can all work together to make the planet strong again. Here in Haimen we have created a protest group made up of 30,000 people, and with us together, we can make a difference. And you can too."

The "Blockadia" role play highlights what ecologist and activist Sandra Steingraber calls an *energy crossroads*. Naomi Klein quotes Steingraber in *This Changes Everything*: "One signpost points to a future powered by digging fossils from the ground and lighting them on fire. The other points to renewable energy. You cannot go in both directions at once."

Our textbook in Portland, Holt McDougal's *Modern World History*, discusses "environmentalists" as if they are some distinct category of humanity apart from all the rest of us. The implication is that they are professionals who are paid to care about global warming and pollution—which, of course, relieves everyone else of that responsibility. The Blockadia role play is meant to suggest something very different. Environmentalists are ordinary people: college students in Pennsylvania, farmers in India, mothers in China, Indigenous people in Montana, young people in Hamburg … and high school students in Oregon.

We wanted the role play to show students how all these far-flung struggles are connected, that we are part of a movement to reimagine and remake the world. We also wanted the role play to impart a vision of activism that is serious but playful—that requires imagination, creativity, generosity, and concern for one another.

There is a lovely several-paragraph section of *This Changes Everything* that could be used with high school students to underscore the hope and warmth of Blockadia. It begins on page 322. "What is clear," Naomi Klein writes, "is that fighting a giant extractive industry on your own can seem impossible, especially in a remote, sparsely populated location. But being part of a continent-wide, even global, movement that has the [fossil fuel] industry surrounded is a very different story." The section describes the totem carvers from the Lummi Nation in Washington state who in 2013 traveled from place to place in the Northwest to highlight the impact of coal exports. The Lummi have been central to the fight against a massive coal-export facility near their land and traditional fishing areas. From extraction to transport to export, the coal threat binds communities throughout the Northwest and—because burning coal is the single biggest contributor to greenhouse gases—throughout the entire world.

Klein ends this section with a quote from Lummi master carver Jewell Praying Wolf James,

who spoke about why they undertook this journey: "We're concerned about protecting the environment as well as people's health all the way from the Powder River to the West Coast . . . We're traveling across the country to help unify people's voices. It doesn't matter who you are, where you are at, or what race you are—red, black, white, or yellow—we're all in this together."

That's the sensibility we hope this role play communicates.

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Blockadia Meeting Solidarity Questions

From the perspective of your role, answer the two questions below. As you meet with other groups and learn about their situations, share your answers and think about what you could do to support their struggles.

1. What led you to take action? Think about what makes you angry. Think about what gives you hope. What is it that motivates you to make a difference?

2. What should the world know about the issues that concern you and about how your activism has made a positive difference?

New Era Colorado

Boulder, Colorado, United States

YOU ARE A MEMBER of New Era Colorado. Founded in 2006 by a small group of college graduates, New Era Colorado set out to engage, educate, and train a new generation of active citizens and young leaders in Colorado. You've always been concerned about climate change, but for a long time you didn't think there was much you could do about it. "Eventually, someone will come up with some new technology that will fix the climate," you thought.

But in college you read a report written by Mark Jacobson and Mark Delucchi, which totally changed your perspective on climate change. This report showed "how 100 percent of the world's energy, for *all* purposes, could be supplied by wind, water, and solar resources, by as early as 2030." What you realized was that the biggest obstacle to saving the planet from catastrophic climate change was not technological—the technology is already there—but social and political. It was up to ordinary people to demand their governments switch to renewable energy sources. You and other activists first approached your city's electricity supplier, Xcel Energy, to try to convince them to switch to renewable energy sources. Xcel Energy is a large corporation that gets more than 60 percent of its power from coal. Unfortunately, when they announced plans to invest $400 million in new coal-fired powered plants, it became clear that Xcel had no interest in switching to renewables.

You knew that this plan would be a disaster for the climate and you also knew that there was huge potential for alternatives in Colorado. Colorado's plains, mountains, and 300 days of annual sunshine make it an ideal place to develop wind and solar power. After years of trying to pressure Xcel to shift away from coal and toward renewable energy, you came up with a new idea: take your electricity grid back. Boulder is an environmentally minded community, yet thanks to Xcel, Boulder is one of the most carbon-intensive energy users in the country.

Working with local officials, activists like you helped draft two ballot measures to give the city the authority and financing to buy back its energy grid from Xcel. Xcel poured nearly $1 million into trying to defeat the ballot measures. New Era Colorado countered Xcel's slick and misleading advertising campaign by mobilizing young people, who worked phone banks and knocked on doors, talking to people in the community.

In 2011, despite being outspent nearly 10 to one, your pro-renewables coalition narrowly won both ballot measures. The coalition assembled an all-volunteer "Citizen Technical Team" that worked out a model using solar, wind, and electricity-use data to analyze Boulder's electricity mix. Then you publicized your analysis to voters. You explained that a locally owned utility could reduce the city's carbon emissions by two-thirds, nearly double its use of renewable energy sources, and keep rates the same as, or lower than, those charged by Xcel. This could be done because a locally owned utility would produce energy to benefit the community, not to enrich Xcel's shareholders.

Boulder voters liked the idea that the city could be powered by clean energy through a public utility that would make fighting climate change more important than making money.

This fight was about democracy; it was about David vs. Goliath; it was about our planet and health vs. corporate greed.

So when Xcel supported another ballot initiative in 2013 that would have blocked the formation of a new public utility, this time Boulder defeated Xcel's initiative by 2-to-1. You and other citizens of Boulder stood up and said no to corporate control and put your community on a path to take control over your energy future.

Xcel has continued to resist selling Boulder's energy grid back to its citizens, so in 2014 the city filed a petition to "condemn" portions of the electric system through "eminent domain." Eminent domain allows a city to take over private property if it is for the greater good of the community. And slowing climate change is clearly for the greater good of the community. You hope that your story in Boulder can inspire other cities across the country: Take back your energy grids and save the planet!

Anti-Coal Activists

Haimen, China

YOU LIVE IN HAIMEN, a small city in Guangdong province in southern China. China has become a battleground over dirty energy, and in particular—coal.

Here is what led you to join that battle.

Over the past decade, coal has fueled China's rapidly growing economy, making up more than half of China's energy mix. Between 2005 and 2011, China built roughly two new coal-fired power plants *per week*. China burns more than 4 billion tons of coal each year—four times that of the United States. And in 2007, China surpassed the United States to become the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide. You understand that the future of the planet will be decided in so-called developing countries like China. If China continues the dirty energy path it's on, it will lead to a climate nightmare.

Because of China's carbon emissions, many in the West blame China for the climate crisis. But while some of China's increase in emissions is certainly tied to China's own internal development—bringing electricity to rural areas and building roads—a lot of it is directly tied to foreign trade with the West. According to one study, between 2002 and 2008, nearly half of China's total emissions were related to producing goods for export. In other words, China is spewing coal in order to power the factories that make more stuff for countries like the United States—TVs, iPhones, computers, furniture, toys, you name it. The products may be made in China, but they are sold in the West.

Furthermore, industrializing countries like China have contributed only a fraction of the 200 years of pollution that has caused today's climate crisis. Industrialized, wealthy countries, which represent less than 20 percent of the world's population, have emitted almost 70 percent of all the greenhouse gas pollution that is now wrecking the planet.

In Haimen, the pollution generated from a coal-fired power plant built in 2008 led to a rise in cancer rates among Haimen residents and the destruction of the city's fishing industry. So when a second coal plant was proposed in 2011, you knew it was time to act.

You and fellow anti-coal activists organized 30,000 residents to surround a government building and block a highway to protest the plans for a new coal plant. Police reacted harshly beating demonstrators and firing tear gas into the crowd. After days of protests and attacks by police, government officials declared that the expansion plans would be "temporarily suspended."

The protest in Haimen is one of many that have been taking place in China in the last several years. It has now become impossible to avoid the blanket of toxic air in many Chinese cities. In 2013, in China's capital city, Beijing, air pollution levels skyrocketed to more than 20 times what was considered "safe" by the World Health Organization. The paper masks that people wear around the cities can't protect us from this putrid smog. Outbreaks of respiratory illness are common. You've heard that children as young as 8 years old are being diagnosed with lung cancer. That's criminal. Ironically, the smog has organized the people. In March 2013, Chen Jiping, a former senior Communist Party official, admitted that pollution is now the single greatest cause of social unrest in China.

And this unrest has produced results. In 2013, China's State Council banned the construction of new coal-fired power plants near Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong. Many dirty energy projects have been canceled or delayed. In 2014, coal consumption in China dropped for the first time in more than a decade and the Chinese government announced plans to double the percentage of its energy that comes from renewable sources. In fact, a report from the International Energy Agency indicated that by 2020, China will account for nearly 40 percent of the growth in the world's renewable energy capacity, far surpassing the United States.

Of course, you're still a long way from ending China's coal boom, but these victories add up. Your activism is helping to keep millions of tons of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere and beginning to create a new development model based on clean, renewable energy.

ecoCheyenne

Northern Cheyenne, Montana, United States

YOU HAVE BEEN FIGHTING the invaders for more than 150 years. In 1876, the Cheyenne, Lakota, and Arapaho joined together to defeat General George Armstrong Custer and the U.S. Army's 7th Cavalry Regiment at what became known as the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Later, you were marched to Oklahoma as prisoners of war. Hundreds died of disease and starvation on the route. Some of you escaped and returned to the Powder River Basin and finally were granted a small reservation along the Tongue River.

Today, the Northern Cheyenne are about 11,000 tribal members, with 5,000 living on the reservation in Southeastern Montana. Now, you face a different kind of invasion: Your tribal lands are surrounded by Montana's largest power plant and second largest coal plant west of the Mississippi and five enormous coal strip mines. But that's not all. In 2010, 1.5 billion tons of coal was leased by the state of Montana to mining giant Arch Coal in the Otter Creek Valley, your ancestral homelands and a place rich with important cultural sites to your tribe. Billions of tons of coal also lie under the Northern Cheyenne Reservation.

Corporations want to "develop" this coal and they say it will help the Northern Cheyenne. But it won't. The only thing developed by coal extraction is profits for rich people. During the last coal boom of the 1970s and 1980s, one study found that for Northern Cheyenne people living on the reservation, unemployment tripled, poverty increased 10 percent, homeownership dropped 20 percent, and median income fell 17 percent. After all this so-called development, your reservation was left with a poverty rate of 87 percent—almost nine of every 10 people on the reservation were poor. Profits boomed, people suffered.

Arch Coal proposes a 7,639-acre area to begin strip mining. As Northern Cheyenne activist Gail Small put it, "It's kind of like the gold rush days. There's a rush to get Indian energy resources." In response, you formed a grassroots group called ecoCheyenne, which has joined with other organizations to keep the coal companies away from tribal land. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management ignored the wishes of the Northern Cheyenne and went ahead and approved coal bed methane leases right on the border of your reservation. They did not consult the tribe.

You are fighting back. In January 2013, more than 100 Northern Cheyenne took over a public hearing hosted by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The "hearing" was phony. Instead of letting you speak to the public, they wanted you to talk into a microphone in the corner of a room. As Tom Mexican Cheyenne said, "In Cheyenne country, we speak to people, not machines." And then, in September of 2015, responding to pressure from the people, the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council voted unanimously to oppose the Tongue River Railroad, a rail line needed by industry to get Otter Creek coal to market. After almost six years of organizing, people power prevailed.

In solidarity, others have joined your struggle. For example, carvers from the Lummi Nation in Washington state went on a journey of solidarity throughout the Northwest United States, bringing with them a hand-carved 22-foot totem pole. They brought a message of Kwel hoy',

meaning "We draw the line," in response to the resource extraction industry. The Lummi would also be hurt by mining coal on your homelands, as the companies want to ship the coal to Asia from ports in Oregon and Washington, including one port on the Lummi land that could destroy traditional fishing sites. So you are joined in common struggle with the Lummi and so many other people around the world. As Lummi master carver Jewell Praying Wolf James explained at a gathering with the Northern Cheyenne: "We're traveling across the country to help unify people's voices; it doesn't matter who you are, where you are at, or what race you are—red, black, white or yellow—we're all in this together."

You have also received solidarity from the Lakota people and Henry Red Cloud on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. You have traveled to the Red Cloud Renewable Energy Center, which trains Native people from around North America, and now you have a number of solar energy projects on the Northern Cheyenne reservation. Who needs coal when you have the sun?

Swarthmore Mountain Justice

Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, United States

YOUR ORGANIZATION BEGAN with a trip to the mountains of West Virginia. It was 2010. You'd traveled from Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania to Appalachia. A group of students stood on Kayford Mountain with Larry Gibson. Gibson's family had lived for generations on Kayford Mountain, but now this piece of paradise was surrounded by mountaintop removal sites. This is coal country, and the process that the companies use to get at the coal within is to scrape off the tops of mountains. The mountains—what the companies call "overburden"—are dumped into the valleys. The results of this mountaintop removal: clearcut forests, poisoned streams, flooding, wildlife destroyed, and beauty turned into ugly moonscapes.

Gibson told you that if you returned to Swarthmore and didn't do anything to help stop this destruction, he'd wasted his time talking with you. That wasn't going to happen. You returned to Swarthmore committed to work in solidarity with the people of Appalachia.

You soon realized that your own university was part of the problem: Your college had invested substantial portions of its $1.8 billion endowment in fossil fuel companies, including coal. The more you thought about it, the more you realized how wrong it was that a college that is supposed to educate future leaders was investing in companies that were destroying that very future. But not only were fossil fuels wrecking the future, they were wrecking the land of people all over the world—people like Larry Gibson in West Virginia. And not in the future—right *now*.

You decided to launch a campaign to get Swarthmore to divest—to sell off—its investments in fossil fuel stocks. You were inspired by learning about the student anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s, and their success in helping to end the racist system of South Africa. You demanded that the university divest from 15 fossil fuel companies.

You brought in speakers and you gathered signatures on petitions. You also wanted to use theater and humor in your activism. You put on a playful divestment version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Your play had ghosts and witches, and got the attention of students who might not have come to a speaker, or might simply have ignored a petition.

About this time the national climate justice group 350.org sponsored a national tour focusing on divestment as a strategy. Soon there were divestment campaigns on 300 college campuses around the country. You decided to bring groups together to talk about divestment and to hear from "frontline communities"—people directly affected by fossil fuel extraction. You brought in speakers from the Beaver Lake Cree Nation fighting tar sands mining in Alberta, Canada; from West Virginia fighting mountaintop removal; and Latino organizers working against oil refinery pollution in Houston. You discovered that people around the world who were hurt the most by fossil fuels were people of color and poor people. You came to see that divestment was about everything from climate change to racism to air pollution to water pollution. And it was about democracy: Who decides that fossil fuels can profit some people and kill others? A rally of 200 people crammed into Swarthmore's main administration building to demand that the college divest from fossil fuels. The Swarthmore board of trustees told you that if they divested from fossil fuels that would be

making a political statement, and they couldn't do that. What?! What could be more "political" than having investments in companies that are destroying lives all over the world?

Swarthmore students were the first to organize and demand divestment. In one respect, you have not yet "succeeded," because Swarthmore has not divested. However, you know that this work *is* successful: You have raised awareness at Swarthmore and around the country; there is much more divestment and anti-fossil fuel activism than ever before; you have built ties of solidarity with organizations across the United States and Canada. And lots of colleges and universities have divested at least some of their fossil fuel investments—places like Stanford, Prescott College in Arizona, Unity College in Maine, Pitzer in California, Sterling College in Vermont. Even Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand—as well as giant media groups like the Guardian in Great Britain. And some are responding to students' demands to not only divest from fossil fuels, but also to reinvest in solar energy and other energy recycling technologies.

This is the struggle of your lives—for environmental justice, for racial justice, for democracy, for the future. You've just begun.

Our Hamburg, Our Grid

Hamburg, Germany

SOMETHING SPECIAL HAPPENED in your city of Hamburg in September of 2013. In Germany's second largest city, the people voted, literally, to "take their power back"—to take control of the city's electricity, gas, and heating grids away from private corporations and put it back in the hands of the people.

With hundreds of other local activists in the group "Our Hamburg, Our Grid," you attended meetings and organized rallies to convince Hamburg's citizens to buy back the grid from the multinational companies that operated it. Your message to voters was simple: Energy is a basic public service that should serve the people, not profit corporations. Instead you promoted "a socially equitable, climate-friendly, and democratically controlled energy supply from renewable energy"—and the people of Hamburg agreed.

The whole of Germany is undergoing a rapid *Energiewende*, or "energy transition" to non-fossil and non-nuclear renewable power, and your group is advocating for Hamburg to be powered by 100 percent wind and solar. The multinational companies operating the grid for the last 20 years don't share this vision. Vattenfall, the largest of Hamburg's private energy providers, still owns two nuclear reactors near Hamburg, as well as two coal power plants that are among the dirtiest polluters in Europe. Even worse, the company discussed plans to expand coal mines in Eastern Germany to extract more lignite, the most polluting form of coal.

There is a shared frustration in Hamburg, and across Germany, that private energy companies are preventing Germany's transition to renewable power. While the German government has been pushing the transition to wind and solar, the big energy companies have their heads stuck in the sand, unwilling to move away from their investments in coal and nuclear power. The growth of renewables in Germany is staggering—from 5 percent of all power in 1999 to 28 percent in 2014—but 90 percent of this growth has come from individuals, community co-ops, and public utilities, not from the private corporations. To see what is possible in Hamburg, just look at the progress made by the cities of Frankfurt and Munich, which have both set 100 percent renewable targets by 2015 and 2025, respectively. Why are these cities so different? Because Frankfurt and Munich have always had publicly owned utilities.

But there is a dirty little secret behind this amazing transition to renewable power in Germany. At the same time that small-scale renewable energy projects were exploding across Germany, the nation's overall greenhouse gas emissions actually *increased* in 2012 and 2013. The problem lies with other sources of energy in Germany, especially coal. The energy strategy of mixing renewables, fossil fuels, and nuclear power has failed to achieve the government's goals to reduce annual CO_2 emissions.

There is a strong anti-nuclear movement in Germany, and in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan, pressure from this movement pushed the government to phase out nuclear power in Germany by 2022. This was a tremendous victory for all Germans concerned about the risks of nuclear power. But there was no similar victory that would phase out Germany's use of coal power—the most damaging power source for the climate.

So what can the German example offer to the world? For one, that there is an important role for governments to play in creating a clean energy future by offering policies and incentives to encourage the mass transition to renewable power. But these policies don't go far enough to ensure a safe climate—which means that your victory in Hamburg is an important step, but needs to go further.

The world is watching. Germany is a test case to prove whether industrialized nations can move quickly toward renewable energy—a move that climate scientists say is essential if we are to prevent a planetary nightmare. Thus far the switch to renewables has been a big success, but coal-powered energy production is still booming, and responsible for a third of Germany's greenhouse gas emissions. The vote to create a municipal utility in Hamburg is a crucial step in this process, but it will take more activism on a national level to ensure that the government phases out all coal mining and power production in near future.

"The Warriors of Sompeta"

Sompeta, India

YOU COME FROM the small village of Sompeta, a place that made national news when your community successfully shut down the construction of a new coal-fired power plant. The Indian government has proposed more than 500 new coal power plants across the country, in an effort to bring electricity to more people, but many of the proposals have been met with resistance from the communities in which the plants are to be built.

An outsider might ask, "Why oppose electricity and all of the modern conveniences that come with it?" But this is the wrong question. In Sompeta, the proposed coal plant would have been built on top of the wetlands that are the basic source of food and water for your village. The land was "given" away when the Andhra Pradesh state government granted a permit to the Nagarjuna Construction Company in charge of building the plant. But when the construction trucks began to roll in, your fellow fishermen and farmers came out by the thousands, putting your bodies on the line to protect the land that has been your community's livelihood for generations.

Krishna Murthy, a Sompeta villager and president of the Struggle Committee, puts it like this: "The struggle in Sompeta is the struggle for tomorrow. . . . People have been living very peacefully in this area for generations together. [Then], suddenly the government decided to hand over the wetland where thousands of people lead their livelihood to a company to put up an industrial power plant."

With hundreds of similar coal plants proposed across India, the struggle in Sompeta is bigger than just one village. The government promises development, jobs, and economic growth will follow from building new power plants, their justification for "giving" away the land from under your feet. But you know how this story ends, how it's played out in neighboring villages. Their growth is your poverty. At best, the power plant might employ a few villagers, but the rest of your community will be left to fend for yourselves. As one villager said, "What can we do? We'll become beggars. Dishwashers. Forced to move to a city far away."

So you fought. The warriors of Sompeta, you called yourselves. Protesting day after day—women and men, old and young—the whole village stood together.

Sompeta made big news on July 14, 2010, when police opened fire on the group of protesters, killing two of your fellow fishermen. Jyothi, from Baruva, a neighboring village of Sompeta, describes the protest, the day the police killed two villagers: "They broke our skulls. Tore our clothes and beat us. After facing such an atrocity there was no turning back. We realized: This is the moment. We have to stand up whether we live or die."

If you had retreated in that moment, the power plant would have likely been built. But you stood your ground, chasing police away with sticks you'd cut from the trees.

The national outrage in the days following the deaths led the government to remove the permit that would have allowed the private company to build the power plant. So for now, the people of Sompeta have won a victory. And your victory has been contagious. Other villages now have the courage to defend their land from similar coal plants. In the nearby village of Kakarapalli, the local people shut down construction of a half-built power plant, and work together to keep up

a checkpoint in the road to ensure the plant isn't completed.

Your local struggle is a global struggle as well. You've learned that people around the world, from China to North America, are protesting coal mines, oil pipelines, and power plants that threaten their land and water, and the stability of the global climate. Indian anti-coal activists have even traveled to the United States to meet and organize with people fighting against coal mining in West Virginia, where coal is mined and then sent to India to be burned in power plants like the one that was supposed to be built in Sompeta. It's exciting to know that people who are fighting similar struggles on opposite sides of the globe, are coming together to support one another.

Sunita Narain, director general of the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment, explains that solutions to the global climate crisis must help create a different model of development in countries like India. "We do not want to first pollute and then clean up. So we need money, we need technology, to be able to do things differently." And that means the wealthy, industrialized nations of the North must pay their climate debts.

Beaver Lake Cree Nation
Alberta, Canada

With a population of just over 900 people, it's hard to imagine that the Beaver Lake Cree Nation could pose a threat to the entire global oil and gas industry. Like all First Nations groups in Canada, your people have persisted through centuries of colonization and racist government policies, and as a result you now have some of the highest poverty rates in the country. How could a people so poor threaten some of the richest companies on the face of the Earth?

The answer lies in the treaty your people signed with the Canadian government in 1876, in which the Beaver Lake Cree agreed to share your land with newcomers in return for the legal right to continue your traditional way of life. For your people, this means that "as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow, we can continue our traditional way of life," including "traditional rights to hunt, fish, trap, and gather for food and support."

The traditional land of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation is a massive area, about the size of Switzerland. But underneath the forests, lakes, and streams where your people have hunted and fished for thousands of years, lies one of the largest deposits of "oil" in the world: the Alberta tar sands. And over the last few decades, the Canadian government has been busy handing out permits to oil and gas corporations that expect to mine, drill, and extract fossil fuels for decades to come. These permits—more than 20,000 of them—have all been granted without the consent or consultation of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation.

The vast network of open pit mines and oil refineries that make up the Alberta tar sands have become the largest industrial project in the world. The name "tar sands" refers to the mix of clay, sand, and oil—called bitumen—that is mined and processed with huge amounts of water and heat to finally create oil. This makes tar sands oil some of the most environmentally destructive oil on the planet. Nonetheless, the Canadian government has cut environmental regulations for companies mining the tar sands, leading to a rush for greater extraction. Production in the region is expected to double from 2 million barrels a day to 4 million barrels a day by 2022.

This is why in 2008, after witnessing years of devastation from gas wells and tar sands extraction, your people launched a lawsuit against the Canadian and Alberta governments for failing to protect your traditional way of life. Oil spills have continually polluted fishing grounds, and many elders say that the fish don't taste good anymore. Hunters have seen deer with green meat, ducks and frogs seem to be disappearing, and most importantly, the caribou herd on Beaver Lake Cree territory has diminished from thousands to only a few hundred.

"The governments of Canada and Alberta have made a lot of promises to our people and we intend to see those promises kept," said Chief Al Lameman. "Governments and industry ignore our concerns. This is our home. This is where we live. We have a responsibility to our children, and to our children's children, to see that the lands where the Cree live, and will always live, remain inhabitable."

The law seems to be on your side—it will be hard for the government to prove that tar sands development is not impacting your traditional way of life. Instead, the government's strategy seems to

be to outspend the Beaver Lake Cree on legal fees, as it has done with similar lawsuits from other First Nations groups. But people from around the world are paying attention to your lawsuit, and are joining in solidarity—an international campaign to help pay for legal fees has raised an astounding $400,000 (U.S.).

The money comes from individuals, grassroots climate groups, and international environmental organizations—all of whom believe that the Indigenous rights of the Beaver Lake Cree are the best chance to stop tar sands expansion and the climate threat it poses.

Crystal Lameman, Beaver Lake Cree spokesperson, puts it this way:

"This is no longer an 'Indian' problem. If you breathe air and drink water, this is about you, too. The battle is to protect one of the world's most important carbon sinks—the boreal forest—and to stop the expansion of Canada's largest industrial producer of greenhouse gases. It is about the inherent rights of First Nations people, collective basic human rights, and the rights of nature."

Group Name	What led them to take action?	What should the world know about their activism?	What can you do to support this group's struggle?

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Your organization, along with many other environmental justice groups, is planning to protest outside the upcoming "Fossil Fuels for a Better World" Conference. In response to your protest, the conference released this "Manifesto" to the press:

Fossil Fuels to the Rescue
A Manifesto

FOR SOME REASON, it seems that people always need an enemy. And today, many people around the world—and here in the streets outside our "Fossil Fuels for a Better World" conference—have decided that the enemy is fossil fuels: oil, coal, and natural gas. People may have good intentions in attacking fossil fuels, but these attacks come at the very moment when the world needs fossil fuels more than ever.

One of the reasons behind the attacks on fossil fuels is resentment at the "greedy" corporations, like ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Shell. No doubt, fossil fuel companies have been very profitable. But why? Because we—the fossil fuel industry—provide the energy people need to live decent lives. Want to heat your home? Want to drive to the store? Want to fly across the country to visit a sick relative? Want to watch your favorite TV show? Well, you can thank oil, coal, and natural gas for how easy—and inexpensive—it is to do all this.

People who attack fossil fuels want us to turn to solar and wind. (And, not surprisingly, some of those people have investments in solar and wind.) But these sources of energy are much more expensive, and they are entirely inadequate for the needs of the poorest people in the world—the people who need energy the very most. Environmentalists worry about the dangers of global warming in the future. But what about the danger of poverty—*today*, not in some distant future? It is sad that the individuals who make the loudest attacks on fossil fuels are often the most privileged. They are students at places like Swarthmore, Harvard, and Stanford—universities that cost tens of thousands of dollars every year.

But let's look at the future and who will need energy the most. At the end of 2014, Exxon published a report, *The Outlook for Energy: A View to 2040*, which shows how the people who need fossil fuel energy in order to move from poverty to the middle class are those who live in the developing countries, like China, India, Indonesia, Turkey, Brazil, Thailand, and Mexico. "Forecasting long-term energy trends begins with a simple fact: people need energy. . . . Over the next few decades, population and income growth—and an unprecedented expansion of the global middle class—are expected to create new demands for energy." By 2040, the report shows, the world will need 35 percent more energy than we use today. *A tiny 12 percent of that new energy will be provided by renewables.* But a whopping 67 percent will be provided by fossil fuels!

The world's population will increase from 7 billion to 9 billion during this period. That means we'll need huge economic growth. As Rex Tillerson, former CEO of Exxon, points out: "Energy is fundamental to economic growth, and oil is fundamental because to this point in time, we have not found, through technology or other means, another fuel that can substitute for the role that oil plays in transportation, not just passenger, individual transportation, but commercial transportation, jet fuel, marine, all the ways in which we use oil as a fuel to move people and things about this planet."

The Exxon *Outlook* report also points out that natural gas is as essential as oil, as it is the fastest growing fuel. And because coal is essential for generating electricity, it will still be "the No. 1 fuel for power generation" in 2040. Without carbon-based fuels there can be no economic growth, and without economic growth the poor will stay poor—in fact, they will get even poorer. The Brookings Institute estimates that the global middle class will grow from 1.9 billion in 2010 to 4.7 billion in 2030. That's more TVs, computers, washing machines, cars, SUVs, and leisure travel.

But it's the very poorest people who need carbon-based energy the most. As Tillerson told the Asia Society in 2013: "Approximately 1.3 billion people on our planet still do not have access to electricity for basic needs like clean water, cooking, sanitation, light, or for the safe storage of food and medicine . . . [which means that] the need to expand energy supplies has a humanitarian dimension that should inform and should guide our energy policy."

You students protesting fossil fuels and calling for divestment; you people opposing coal exports or trying to stop a new coal-powered electricity plant; you environmentalists who complain about fossil fuel pollution: We know you want to make the world better. So do we. Join us in pulling the world out of poverty. Let us work together.

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare for the "Fossil Fuels for a Better World" Protest

1. Your group has been asked to give a speech at the protest. Collectively, write a short speech or spoken word poem that you will say to the crowd. Build off of your role, your meetings with other organizations, your interior monologue, and respond to the statement from the "manifesto" released by the Fossil Fuels for a Better World Conference. You can choose a representative to deliver your speech/poem, or recite it collectively. Think about who your audience is. Is it the fossil fuel companies or is it people from other organizations who have come to express their points of view?
2. Design a poster to display at the protest that connects directly with the struggles of one or more of the other organizations that you met with. You can respond to the fossil fuels "manifesto," use powerful phrases from your role or your interior monologue, but also try to think about how your struggles are connected. Use both words and images.