

Sample Dossier Activities

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GEO 103: Environment and Society | Multilevel Active Engagement in Practice

These activities come from the weekly dossier system I designed for GEO 103: Environment and Society. Rather than relying on a textbook, students work through printed packets during each class session, moving between individual reflection, small-group analysis, and full-class discussion. The dossiers are intentionally AI-resistant: they ask students to annotate, draw, compare, and discuss in real time. Two representative activities appear below.

Activity 1: Enclosure vs. Community Management

Activity type: Comparative analysis with case studies

Part 1: Read and Compare

There are two main ways to manage land and natural resources. Read the short stories below. Each one has some strengths and some problems.

Example 1: Enclosure (Private or Government Control). In a small town, the government gives a large piece of land to a private company to manage. The company builds fences and limits access to the forest, saying this will protect it from overuse. They plant trees and stop illegal logging, which helps the environment. However, local people who used to collect wood and plants now need permission or must pay. Some community members are hired as workers, but others feel excluded. The rules are clear, but local voices are not always part of the decisions.

Example 2: Community Management (Commons). In another village, the forest is shared by all families. People work together to make rules, like limiting how much wood each person can collect. They choose a few community members to monitor the forest. If someone breaks the rules, they may get a warning or help understanding the rule better. Most people follow the rules, but sometimes there are disagreements or unequal use. It takes time and effort to meet and make group decisions, but many people feel a strong sense of responsibility for the land.

Students then complete an analysis chart for each system: Who makes the rules? Who benefits the most? What are the risks or problems? What might work well about this system?

Part 2: Discussion Questions

- Which system do you think is better for the environment? Why?
 - Could one system work better in a city, and another in a village?
 - Is it ever fair to take shared land and turn it into private land?
 - Could we combine these two systems into something better? What would that look like?
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Activity 2: Mapping Environmental Inequality

Activity type: Spatial analysis and visualization

Students draw a simple map of a town or city, real or imaginary, using shapes and labels to show where different things are located. Each map must include:

- At least two neighborhoods: one wealthy and one poor
- A factory or polluting business
- A park or green space
- A trash site, landfill, or polluted area
- A water source (river, lake, or water tower)
- Anything else they want to add (stores, schools, highways)

Reflection Questions

Once the map is complete, students compare maps with a neighbor and answer: Who lives closest to pollution? Who has the best access to nature or clean places? Is this map fair to all people? Why or why not? Can you think of a real place that looks like your map? Where?

Both activities ask students to build their own understanding before any lecture content is delivered, then test that understanding against their peers' perspectives. Hand-drawn maps and completed dossiers also give me a detailed, week-by-week view of each student's learning process.