

# EYES WIDE OPEN

Going Behind the Environmental Headlines

by Paul Fleischman

## ABOUT THE BOOK

The environment is the news story of the century. We're grasping the dangers of civilization-as-usual and are trying to change course, veering away from fossil fuels and switching our thinking from short-term to long-term. Today's students are present at a momentous turning point. But which public voices should they believe? What are the motives of organizations and politicians? *Eyes Wide Open* provides both the facts needed to comprehend the environmental scene and the tools to assess information sources. Alongside context and vocabulary about population, consumption, and climate, students will learn psychological concepts for analyzing motives and gain perspective on the media chatter. Additional resources—documentaries, articles, websites, other books—invite them to expand their understanding of this riveting historical moment.



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### Common Core Connections

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts are designed to scaffold student learning and encourage questioning strategies that ask readers to tackle textual information. The standards increase emphasis on nonfiction texts. To assist educators with facilitating class discussions and designing class instruction for this nonfiction book, discussion questions in this guide are specifically aligned with the Reading Informational Text standards as well as the Speaking & Listening standards. Writing and research activities are designed to give students choices and are aligned with the English Language Arts Writing standards, Reading Informational Text standards, and Speaking & Listening standards.

  
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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Correlates to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details RI. 9–12.1, RI. 9–12.2, RI. 9–12.3; Craft and Structure RI. 9–12.4, RI. 9–12.5, RI. 9–12.6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RI. 9–12.7, RI. 9–10.8. Correlates to ELA Speaking & Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration SL. 9–12.1.

1. *Eyes Wide Open* is about the environmental crisis, but it is also about evaluating information. How does the title reflect that purpose? What tools and approaches does the book offer for analyzing information about the environment? Discuss how the author develops this theme throughout the text. What other current issues could this method be applied to?
2. After the introductory section, each of the book's chapters "offers a different lens to peer through" (page 4). Describe the lenses and analyze how ideas about them are introduced and developed. What are some of the "patterns and principles that are driving the headlines" (page 4)? Cite textual evidence for your answers.
3. Discuss what aspects of the book the subtitle *Going Behind the Environmental Headlines* conveys. The book design incorporates pictures of newspaper headlines. What purpose do these graphics serve? Choose five or ten of them and explain how they relate specifically to the adjacent text.
4. Other visual elements also support the author's points. Analyze the use of graphs and how they expand on the narrative. What are the advantages of presenting information in a graph rather than using only words? Choose several other specific visuals such as photographs, cartoons, and ads, and describe how they relate to the text, what they add to it, or how they clarify it.
5. In the first chapter, the author explains that he has drawn on "history, psychology, and sociology to help explain what's going on" (page 7). How does the author develop ideas related to history throughout the text? How does he make connections among those ideas? Discuss specific examples—including at least one "Backstory" (pages 50, 84, and 114)—and how those examples relate to our current problems.
6. The author offers psychological explanations for the public's different reactions to the environmental crisis. Outline how he develops this topic, the major points he makes, and how he uses terms and concepts from psychology to make those points. Evaluate the strength of his arguments about at least two of the psychological concepts.
7. Contrast the Big Three (U.S., Canada, and Australia) with other countries, discussing how their history and geography have affected their attitudes. Discuss environmental concerns about China and India and why these two countries are so important. Support your answers with evidence from the text and assess whether the author's reasoning about these countries is valid.

8. A banner on page 6 reads, “We All Live Downstream.” What are the figurative meanings of this slogan? How does the poster reflect a major theme of the book, and how is that theme developed? Find examples in the text in which literally living downstream has an environmental impact.
9. In the section “How to Weigh Information,” the author writes, “Buy your gas from Exxon but get your science elsewhere” (page 155). Using examples from the text, discuss how vested interests such as Exxon influence politics, policy, and the public. How can the influence of vested interests be identified and evaluated in ads, articles, and other media?
10. Consider the author’s statement that this book “is a door leading to many other doors” (page 7), referring to the suggested resources such as websites, books, articles, and documentaries. Compare these types of information sources and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. How does offering so many resources relate to the title of the book?
11. What is the author’s point of view about climate change? Give explicit and implicit evidence to support your answer. Can you discern his political leanings? If so, how? Where does he alert readers to different points of view? Discuss what this reveals about his approach to critical thinking.
12. The author, who is also a poet and novelist, uses imagery to help make his points. For example, in the first chapter he talks about technology’s side effects as “the jaws behind the environmental crunch” (page 5). Find other figurative language in the text, identify what’s being compared, and discuss the impact on the reader. Describe the author’s tone based on specific examples from the text.

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Correlates to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details RI. 9–12.1, RI. 9–12.2, 9–12.3; Craft and Structure RI. 9–12.4; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RI. 9–12.7, 9–10.8. Correlates to ELA Speaking & Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration SL. 9–12.1, 9–12.2; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL. 9–12.4, 9–12.5. Correlates to ELA Writing Standards: Text Types and Purposes W. 9–12.1, 9–12.2; Production and Distribution of Writing W. 9–12.4; Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 9–12.7, 9–12.8.

1. *Eyes Wide Open* suggests taking a “salad bar approach” to keep up with environmental issues and lists five websites (page 144). Have students choose two of the websites listed and compare them in detail, considering their content and design and their strengths and weaknesses. Students can create a graphic organizer such as a comparison chart or Venn diagram to highlight similarities and differences. Discuss the five websites as a class, comparing student assessments of them.

2. Have students each choose a different website recommended in the book and put it through the steps described in the “How to Weigh Information” appendix. Students should write their evaluations in detail with specific evidence to support their points. They should address the questions raised under “Websites” on page 154 and the three numbered points in the appendix: follow the money, beware of mental vested interests, and check for fallacies.
3. Front groups are organizations, often nonprofits, that disguise their sources of funding and support. Have each student choose a group from the list at Sourcewatch (page 31) ([www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Front\\_groups](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Front_groups)) and do independent research on that group: evaluating its website, researching board members, and trying to determine who funds it. After they've done their research, have students compare what they found to the information listed at Sourcewatch. Have them write a short paper that lays out their evaluation and compares what they found to what Sourcewatch provides.
4. *Eyes Wide Open* makes the point that the everyday products we use have unseen costs. Have pairs of students choose a familiar product and research its production and hidden costs, using the resources on pages 45 and 184. Have them create a poster or infographic that mixes text and visuals to share their information with the rest of the class.
5. “Air-conditioning. Phone calls bouncing off satellites. Clothes driers and gas lawn mowers” (page 4). These are conveniences that became widely available only in the last few decades. Have students talk to older adults about what has changed in their lifetime. Then, as a group, make a list of common items that have become widely used in the last twenty or thirty years. Each student should choose five of the items and write a paragraph for each describing how their life would be different without it.
6. Even within the world of environmentalists, disagreements exist. In the section “Revising views” (page 152), the author lists five areas about which some environmentalists have changed their minds. Have students debate these topics (or similar ones mentioned in the book) formally, with two students for each side of a given topic. After researching the topic, students should prepare a speech and be ready to give and receive cross-examination. Students can present their debate in front of small groups or the whole class.
7. The author suggests that popular media doesn't show that “we're facing a major crisis” (page 43). Have students each take a different magazine or different issue of the same magazine aimed at their age group and analyze the depiction of the environment in the ads and articles. Have them prepare a short multimedia presentation to share their findings with the rest of the class.
8. The glossary lists many of the concepts introduced in the book: *cap and trade*, *carbon capture*, *greenwashing*, *normalcy bias*. Have students choose a word or phrase new to them, either from the text or the glossary, and research more about it using a variety of print and online resources. They can share their findings in small group discussions.

## WEBSITE

The environment is the news story of the century. *Eyes Wide Open* gives you the tools to comprehend it, and [www.EyesWideOpenUpdates.com](http://www.EyesWideOpenUpdates.com) carries the book into the future with these features:

**Headlines** will keep you on top of events.

**My blog** follows the struggle to change direction, refines the book's thinking, and discusses topics that didn't make it in.

**Resources** gives you a continually updated list of recommended websites, books, documentaries, and articles.

**Reports** brings the process full circle: your writing, photos, and videos showing how global environmental issues are playing out on your street and letting you see what other readers are seeing.

A freighter at full speed has massive momentum. A civilization has even more. We've only been trying to alter course for a short time, opposed by huge vested interests and our own habits of mind. No wonder the change isn't swift or smooth. It's a time of bold advances and shameful retreats, nearsightedness and boundless imagination, with fresh data and events constantly reshaping our thinking. What better time to have your eyes wide open?

## ABOUT PAUL FLEISCHMAN



Paul Fleischman has written novels, poetry, plays, and nonfiction. He has won many awards, including the Newbery Medal for *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*. He was also a finalist for the National Book Award and has been short-listed for the international Hans Christian Andersen Award. He lives with his wife in Aromas, California.

This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean. Kathleen was a school librarian for more than fifteen years and now presents all-day workshops on new books for young people, including one that focuses on Common Core nonfiction. She served as chairperson of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and is the author of several guides to children's books, including *Great Books for Girls*, *Great Books for Boys*, and *Great Books About Things Kids Love*.