

The Water Walker: Indigenous Wisdom and Water Contamination



Est. Time: 60 minutes

Subjects: STEAM/CivicsAge

Range: Late Elementary/Middle School

See the full lesson [here!](#)

Special thanks to Seeing Red Media for footage from The Water Walker

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In what ways do Indigenous views of water align with scientific views, and how do Indigenous activists use artistic expression to advocate for water protection?

In this lesson, you will:

- View clips from the documentary *The Water Walker* and discover the work of Anishinaabe-kwe environmental activist Autumn Peltier
- Conduct an experiment to better understand how plants absorb solutes in water
- Compare Indigenous and scientific perspectives on water contamination and its threats to the environment
- Explore how environmental activists have used art and music to advocate for clean water

Watch [this video](#) from The Water Walker documentary.

Consider or ask a partner:

- According to the clip, what is a “Water Walker”?
- Why do Water Walkers defend clean water?
- Do you think a Water Walker is important today? Why or why not?
- Why might it be important to defend water?



Watch [this video](#) to be introduced to a young Water Walker named Autumn Peltier.

Consider or ask a partner:

- Who is Autumn Peltier?
- What was one of the reasons Autumn Peltier became a “water warrior”?
- Based on the clip, how did Autumn Peltier choose to protect water?
- Why might she be concerned about pipelines? What are pipelines? How might pipelines lead to water contamination?



As the previous clip hints, Autumn Peltier first gained prominence by protesting the Kinder Morgan Pipeline in Canada.

To learn more about this pipeline project, watch [the CBC News video, “Canada’s Kinder Morgan pipeline explained.”](#)

Consider or ask a friend:

- How would you describe the Kinder Morgan Pipeline Project?
- What is carried in this pipeline?
- What potential benefits does the pipeline offer?
- What are the potential drawbacks?
- Why might people be opposed to the pipeline?

Watch [this](#) video from The Water Walker documentary.

Consider or ask a partner:

- According to Stephanie Peltier, what is the importance of water?
- Why might Stephanie Peltier be concerned about the pipeline?

Now you will conduct an experiment to test whether Stephanie Peltier's perspective on water is similar to a scientific perspective.

For this experiment, you will need:

- 3-5 white flowers
- 3-5 jars
- 3-5 different colors of food coloring
- Water
- Marker or labels

Follow these steps to conduct the experiment:

- First, download or print [Handout - Water Contamination Experiment](#).
- Next, conduct the experiment described in Part 1 of the handout, draft your hypothesis, and let the experiment sit for 24 hours.
- Then, after 24 hours, chart your observations in Part 2 of the handout.
- Finally, complete Part 3 of the handout.

Rewatch [this](#) video from *The Water Walker* documentary now that you have completed the experiment.

Consider or ask a friend:

- Based on the experiment you conducted, do you feel Stephanie Peltier's perspective on water is based in science? Why or why not?



As part of her activism, Autumn Peltier spoke at the United Nations on the topic of water contamination. Watch [this video](#) to hear portions of her speech before the United Nations General Assembly.

Consider or ask a friend:

- What are some of the reasons why Autumn Peltier feels protecting water is important?
- What might she mean by the phrase, “Warrior Up”? How might someone who cares about water “warrior up”?



Environmental activists often use music and art to spread their message.

In response to a similar pipeline project developed in 2016 near the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Reservation between North and South Dakota, the musician Taboo of the Black Eyed Peas and Hip Hop Caucus produced the music video, “Stand Up / Stand N Rock.”

Watch the video [here](#).

Then consider or ask a friend:

- What stood out to you about this video?
- Were there any visuals or lyrics that stood out?
- Did you see any similarities between the message of this video and the work of Autumn Peltier? Why might they be similar?
- How might music be a vehicle for environmental activism?

SUMMARY

- Anishinaabe-kwe environmental activist Autumn Pelletier is a Water Walker who has gained international renown for her environmental advocacy.
- Through simple experiments you can observe how plants absorb solutes in water.
- There are similarities between the Indigenous and scientific perspectives.
- Musicians such as Taboo use music as a way to advocate for environmental concerns.

BE CREATIVE

- Examine the photograph above and then use art materials to create a similar climate protest sign. Utilize the scientific and Indigenous knowledge you gained from this lesson as inspiration.



BE CURIOUS

- Watch the complete *The Water Walker* documentary: contact storytelling@weareseeingred.com to arrange a screening.
- Select one person featured on [the United Nations' "Meet 13 Indigenous Young Indigenous Rights Activists" list](#). Conduct additional research on the person you selected. Then, write a short summary of who they are, what their environmental concerns are, and how they are pursuing activism.

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