

Michael Mieszala – Warren Township High School  
**THERE WATER BE A LAW!**

**Concept:** Students will write their own piece of water legislation relating to a water issue: Hypoxia (dead zones) as caused by runoff.

**Summary:** Students work in groups to write a piece of water legislation and then analyze the legislation of another group.

**Grade level:** Middle School, High School

**Setting:** Classroom and School Library and/or Computer Lab

**Duration:** 5 to 10 class periods (Dependent upon the structure of your school day and what you choose to assign as homework.)

**Illinois Learning Benchmarks:** 13.B.5 c-e

**Objectives:**

1. Students will identify and recognize inalienable rights that relate to water quality and water availability.
2. Students will identify water users within the Illinois River watershed and water users in or surrounding their community.
3. Students will write a piece of legislation that addresses a threat to water quality and water availability and that ensures the inalienable rights of the identified water users.

**Materials:** “Of Time and the River” Website, Internet access, Project Wet: Water Bill of Rights, Rights/Users check sheet (developed by the teacher from class activities), various resources relating to Hypoxia as determined by the teacher.

**Preparation:** The teacher should make sure that the students are knowledgeable about non-point source pollution, hypoxia (dead zones), and possible sources of pollution causing hypoxia. The teacher should make sure that the students are familiar with the focal points and workings of various pieces of water related legislation. The class should conduct the activity “Water Bill of Rights” from Project Wet.

**Procedure:**

1. Conduct the activity “Water Bill of Rights” from Project WET curriculum guide. This will take approximately 2 class periods.
2. Discuss with students:
  - a) Your community and its surrounding area within the Illinois River watershed or a tributary watershed.

- b) List different people, businesses, occupations, services, recreational activities, etc. that occur within the watershed. From this list identify the users of water. Combine and edit your list down to 10 to 15 water users within the watershed.

This will take approximately 1 to 2 class periods.

3. Discuss with students:

- a) Have students use the “Of Time and the River” website and examine the section titled “Overview of Federal Water Pollution Legislation” within the “Resources” section.
- b) You can devote as much or as little time to this as you choose. Remember, sometimes ignorance is bliss!
- c) You can go further by having students research and investigate the various pieces of legislation identified in the website.
- d) Discuss their findings. What are the components of the piece of legislation? What is common to each piece of legislation? Can we develop an outline to write a piece of legislation from these?

This will take approximately 1 to 3 class periods.

4. Discuss information about hypoxia with your students.

- a) This can be done as a PowerPoint presentation by the teacher, using student internet research, and/or as assigned readings. See the Resources section of this activity.

5. Divide your students into small groups, 3 to 4 students per group (It’s your decision!). Each group will write a piece of legislation that is designed to:

- a) Insure the inalienable water rights that were identified.
- b) Insure these inalienable rights for all identified water users.
- c) Address the problem of hypoxia from non-point sources of pollution and runoff.

This will take 3 or more class periods.

6. Collect the legislation pieces and distribute them to different groups. Have each group analyze the legislation using the “rights/users check sheet” developed by the teacher. To do this the teacher should create the check sheet in a table format for the students from the rights and users that were identified by the class previously in this activity. The headings for the table are “Inalienable Water Rights” vs. “Water Users”. Was each right assured to each user?

7. Discuss the questions provided and others that emerge during the activity with the students.

**Questions:**

1. Were all users addressed? Why or why not?
2. Were all rights met? Why or why not?
3. What was good about our legislation?
4. Did we successfully address the issue? If not, why not?
5. Could we combine all of our good points and all of our pieces of legislation to make one better piece of legislation?
6. What problems did you encounter in writing your legislation?

**Extensions:**

1. Have another class in your school (such as Business Law, Economics, etc.) analyze your piece of legislation and make comments.
2. Develop one piece of legislation for the entire class.
3. Have a lawyer or politician come to your class to talk about and analyze your piece of legislation.
4. Divide your class in 2 and have the groups conduct the activity from the perspective of 2 different time periods such as 1800's and 1900's.
5. Develop your legislation for a specific body of water in your community and present your legislation to your village or county governmental body.

**Resources:**

1. Project WET: (406) 994-5392  
(This can also be obtained through the USFWS)
2. "Enriching the Sea to Death" in Scientific American Presents: The Oceans  
[www.sciamedigital.com](http://www.sciamedigital.com)
3. [www.epa.gov/water/yearofcleanwater/docs/Hypoxia\\_Factsheet](http://www.epa.gov/water/yearofcleanwater/docs/Hypoxia_Factsheet)
4. [www.epa.gov/msbasin](http://www.epa.gov/msbasin)
5. [www.nos.noaa.gov/products/pubs\\_hypox.html](http://www.nos.noaa.gov/products/pubs_hypox.html)
6. [www.sws.uiuc.edu](http://www.sws.uiuc.edu)  
(Do a search of hypoxia)

**Check Sheet Example:**

<b>Water Users (across) Water Rights (down)</b>	<b>People (Drinking Water)</b>	<b>People (Recreation)</b>	<b>Etc?</b>	<b>Etc?</b>
<b>Access</b>	X	X		
<b>Quantity</b>	X			
<b>Etc?</b>				
<b>Etc?</b>				