NEWS BREAK

Article: What’s killing seals along South Africa’s coast

Section: MAIN, A5

Sunday’s News Break selects an article from Sunday, February 13, 2022 of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

*Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

Students will discuss the issues surrounding seal deaths-disease, lack of food and climate change. They’ll discuss why the death of thousands of seals in the last 6 months isn’t getting media attention or exposure. Students will learn about Domoic Acid, released in some algae blooms, and how it can move up the human food chain. Students will talk about why the South African government isn’t helping more
Pre-Reading Discussion:

- What do you think the article will be about, using only this picture?
- Are there any clues?
- What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using context clues? A context clue is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the identities and meanings of unknown words.

A motley crew of younger women huddled over the carcasses.

Motley Crew Guess:

Motley Crew Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Marine species on the coasts around Cape Town are facing multiple crises. What are the 3 main ones that the article discussed?
2. Why don’t fisherman care more about the seals?
3. Are seals endangered?
4. Is seal mortality high or low?
5. But Gridley’s leading theory for what’s killing the seals is also a toxin that in high concentrations can pose a threat to humans and their food. What is this toxin and how can it make its way into the food chain?
6. In humans, it can cause what is called amnesic shellfish poisoning, which can cause what symptoms?
7. Domoic acid poisoning has been linked in peer-reviewed studies to what?
8. Through a U.S. government-funded program called ______________ ______________, California now regularly tests ocean water and marine organisms for domoic acid and other toxins, and has tied the legality of seafood harvests and sales to toxin levels found in those samples.

9. Gridley and her husband are whale and dolphin experts — Gridley focuses on bioacoustics—what is that?

10. Concerned citizens eventually found Gridley, most via social media, where Gridley’s nonprofit, ______ _________, is active.

11. Why is a freshly dead specimen essential when testing for domoic acid?

12. Brains and other organs require permits to ship internationally because they are animal parts, but seal feces can be sent without one. The probability that one factor — domoic acid, in this case — is solely to blame is ______________.

13. With ______________ ______________ and ______________ ______________ dramatically reshaping marine ecosystems, the answer is almost always a combination of factors. “We have to be really sure it’s domoic acid before we say that publicly,” said Gridley. “It has the potential to cause real alarm, so we’re not rushing to any conclusions

Discussion Questions (small/large groups), Journal Prompts or Essay Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first I thought ______________, but now I think ____________?
- What things did you already know from prior experience?

Gridley, 40, is convinced this is abnormal, and a mystery worth solving that has potential implications reaching far beyond seals. “Seals are just gone from whole areas of coast, and no one has batted an eye,” she said. “I’m filling a gap because it seems nobody else will.”

- Why do you think the South African government or other agencies aren’t causing a stir about the large deaths among the seal population?

News Break is posted to the Web on Monday. Please share this NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please register online or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.

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