



Climate Justice in Minnesota

Eighth Grade
Language Arts
Minnesota



(L-R) Student art in front of the high school Tipi, tipi sponsored by our Native American Parent Committee and Native American Student Association, outdoor classroom on Bdewakantunwan Dakota homelands.

We, at my school, are blessed to live on the land of the Bdewakantunwan Dakota homelands. It is our job to honor the history of our land.

I understand climate justice as such: the climate crisis affects people differently depending on where they live, their resources, and their ability to recover from disasters. Poor communities often struggle more to rebuild after climate-related disasters compared to wealthier areas. Ensuring fair treatment and equitable distribution of the burdens and benefits related to the climate crisis is essential to making its effects more equal for everyone. In the city where I teach, transportation is easier, allowing for lower emissions, while in Minneapolis, navigating the city can be more challenging. To make a positive impact, we can focus on reducing pollution, using less oil, cutting back on coal power, and shifting toward greener solutions. Taking steps to lessen reliance on fossil fuels and adopt sustainable practices can help fix the world and create a more resilient future.

Our high school offers various ways for students to engage in climate justice and climate literacy. While specific programs aren't explicitly listed online, the school emphasizes student voice, innovation, and meaningful educational experiences. Students can choose clubs that focus on climate issues such as the sustainability club. The Native American Student Association, also known as NASA, is a student-led organization dedicated to raising the voices of Native American students every day in our public schools. Every year, NASA holds several events to celebrate and to educate. Students in NASA coordinate celebrations on Indigenous People's Day at all of our city's schools. NASA students have also had opportunities to visit the prairie farms on the Nation and learn to cook healthy and native foods. Visits to the Prairie Island Buffalo Project are available to students.

He Mni Can, also known as Barn Bluff, is an important cultural and spiritual site for the Dakota people. For centuries, it has served as a place for gathering, ceremonies, and worship. Recognizing the need to preserve this history, the Prairie Island Indian Community collaborated with the city on a multi-year restoration project, which was completed in 2021. This effort ensured the Bluff remains accessible for the Dakota people and continues to be a place of cultural significance for future generations. Beyond restoration, the project also aimed to educate the broader community about the site's historical importance, reinforcing the connection between Red Wing's natural landscapes and Indigenous heritage.



Dakota Restoration Project at He Mni Can

As a teacher in this place, I believe it's essential for our students to understand the deep history of this land—especially the Dakota people. At the same time, climate justice is a necessity due to the treatment of Indigenous people in our city. We have faced climate-related challenges, and our community is actively working toward solutions. From our city's Climate Action Work Plan—which aims to drastically cut emissions by 2040—to the ways we come together after

environmental hardships, I want my students to see that climate action is possible and necessary. In our classroom, we explore local partnerships, sustainability efforts, and the intersection between social and environmental justice to prepare students to be engaged citizens.

I am excited to collaborate with others to enhance my facilitation of climate studies for my students. By incorporating children's literature, biographies, interviews, and personal narratives from the people of our city, I aim to make climate education more engaging and locally relevant. Through storytelling, students can connect deeply with environmental issues, understand diverse perspectives, and recognize the impact of climate change on our community. This approach fosters critical thinking, empathy, and active participation in climate justice initiatives.



Mural dedication