

Activities:**2.2 Advocacy Letter Writing Activity****Disappearing Elephants
Advocacy Letter Writing Activity**

Aim: Students will be able to write an advocacy letter supporting their opinions on what governments should do regarding the ivory situation.

Content Objectives:

- Understand the different levels of government and how they function on a global scale (local, national and international)
- Explain the current threats to African elephants
- Explain the current threats to Asian elephants
- Identify possible circumstances where advocacy letter writing can influence government
- Write a letter to local or national government
- Outline the process of how civil action can influence social change
- Design a plan to take their advocacy letter to a level where it can create change

Vocabulary:

- Advocacy
- Ban
- Campaign
- CITIES
- Civil society
- Democracy
- Freedom of Expression
- Government
- International
- Ivory
- Local
- Market
- National
- Petition
- Protest
- Rights (civil, political, human, animal)
- Smuggling
- Social media



Materials:

- Disappearing Elephants overview, posters, handouts, and online materials
- *Battle for Elephants* DVD/online film
- Celia Ho's advocacy letter from the South China Morning Post
- Washington Post article: "The grisly economics of elephant poaching"

Procedure:**Hour one:** Understanding Advocacy and Democratic Rights to Free Speech

a) Stimulate discussion about social change:

- "What rules do you think we should change in our country?"
- "What rules should change that would make the world a better place?"
- "What would you advocate for?"

b) Create a list of social changes throughout history. As a group, create a list of rules that have changed throughout history and have made the world a better place (e.g. women voting, laws against racism, gay rights).

c) Create a list of social changes going on today. Students list social changes that are happening today and their desires for future social changes. Analyze why or why not these changes have been implemented. What methods are used to create change?

d) Read advocacy letter from Celia Ho to the South China Morning Post.

Hour two: Research Ivory Topic

a) Watch the film *Battle for Elephants* or use Disappearing Elephants material to introduce ivory trade issue.

b) Assign article "The grisly economics of elephant poaching" from the Washington Post.

Hour three: Writing Their Position

a) Students will discuss article and video, sharing opinions about whether or not we should burn ivory, ban ivory or regulate the trade of ivory.

b) Students will write an advocacy letter to their government on the ivory trade. Explain that any position is fine.

c) If students want to pursue taking their activity further, have them create a plan for their next steps by posting their letters online or sending them to their local governments.



South China Morning Post

October 3 2012

Ivory market an example of inhumanity

Badges of wealth vary widely, from jewels to Rolex watches. In recent decades, however, there has come another one – ivory – which is regarded as both a symbol of status and a substance from which religious icons are made.

As a result, however, African elephants have been the victims of this outrageous trend.

For the sake of satisfying the limitless hunger of ivory collectors, especially the rich in China, at least 25,000 elephants are killed every year. Picture the scene. Smell the death. It's cruel and inhumane.

In 1997, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe was quoted as saying elephants must pay for their room and board with their ivory. That is totally ridiculous. We, humans, share the natural world with other living things, and we all have the right to live on this lovely earth. But people have the responsibility to protect it, and Dr Jane Goodall, a primatologist who has devoted all her energy to saving endangered species, was quoted as saying: "If we are the most intellectual creature that has ever walked on the planet, how come we are destroying that planet?"

The supply of ivory is no longer sustainable. It is time for us to rectify our mistakes before an irreversible disaster occurs. Please stop killing elephants!

As a Form Three student, I cannot do anything to help with this situation except to plead with countries worldwide to stop devastating a species that is already losing ground. Before they become extinct, let's save them, and our planet as well.

Celia Ho, Wong Tai Sin



The Washington Post

The grisly economics of elephant poaching

By Brad Plumer November 6, 2013

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [has declared](#) that it will destroy six tons of confiscated African elephant ivory next week — a stockpile amassed over 25 years. The aim is to deter ivory poachers, who have been [killing record numbers](#) of elephants in recent years.



Ivan Lieman/AFP/Getty Images - An elephant is pictured in Tsavo East National Park in southern Kenya in January 2013.



"We want to send a clear message that the United States will not tolerate ivory trafficking and the toll it is taking on elephant populations, particularly in Africa," the agency said in a statement.

But does this unconventional tactic actually deter poaching? Countries have destroyed their confiscated ivory stockpiles before. Kenya [did it](#) twice in 1989 and 1991. Gabon [burned](#) tens of thousands of pounds of ivory, culled from 850 elephants, just last year. Yet some economists remain skeptical that this is the best way to stem the illegal ivory trade — part of a debate over the economics of poaching that has persisted for years.

Over at the Property and Environment Research Center, Michael 't Sas-Rolfes, a conservation economist based in South Africa, [argues](#) that the "ivory crush" could actually prove counterproductive. The move will reduce the global supply of ivory without affecting demand at all. That, in turn, could drive up the implicit "price" and perversely *encourage* further poaching:

In 1989, Kenya's dramatic ivory burn seemed to have the desired effect. It raised global awareness, helped bring about an international ivory trade ban, and attracted substantial donations to Kenyan conservation efforts.

During the last decade, however, Asian demand for ivory has grown and continues to do so with rising affluence. Consumer surveys show that demand is currently widespread and not always concerned about ethical issues related to the source of supply. ...

We know that destroying stockpiles reduces supply, but not necessarily demand. The ill-conceived USFWS gesture could create the perception that ivory is an increasingly scarce commodity on illegal markets, leading to higher prices and further poaching.



The Fish & Wildlife Service, for its part, doesn't agree with this. Their position is that the confiscated ivory was *already* off the market, so the destruction won't affect global supply much at all. The main point is to send a message that poaching is unacceptable.

Fish & Wildlife officials also argue that there's no good way to put the confiscated ivory back on the market, to create a legal trade that would satiate demand. That's because, they say, doing so would make it easier for poachers to launder illegal ivory. Here's an FAQ that the agency [has posted](#) on the subject:

Why doesn't the Service sell the ivory?

... It is extremely difficult to differentiate legally acquired ivory, such as ivory imported in the 1970s, from ivory derived from elephant poaching. Our criminal investigations and antismuggling efforts have clearly shown that legal ivory trade can serve as a cover for illegal trade. Therefore, selling the ivory stockpile and allowing it to enter the marketplace could contribute to increased elephant poaching and stimulate even more consumer demand for ivory.

Won't destroying this ivory make elephant ivory rarer, thus driving up the cost and creating a greater incentive for poaching?

As we explained above, this ivory would never be made available to the market. Its destruction has no impact on the overall supply and does not create any incentive for poaching. By demonstrating our commitment to combat poaching and illegal trade, and to arrest and prosecute people who engage in these activities, we are providing a strong disincentive to poachers and wildlife traffickers.

The economics of the ivory trade has always been a difficult subject, stretching



back for years. Back in 1989, some 175 countries agreed to a global moratorium on ivory sales. But then, in 1999 and again in 2008, a few countries, including South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, were allowed to sell off some of their ivory stockpiles legally, with the proceeds going toward conservation.

Those "one-off" sales triggered a fierce debate. Critics argued that legal sales would lead to an uptick in poaching by making it easier for illegal ivory to go undetected. Proponents argued that the sales would reduce demand for poaching and raise money for elephant protection. Studies have been [fairly inconclusive](#) on this question, with evidence on both sides. (Sas-Rolfes [offers reasons](#) to think the sales weren't very beneficial for elephant conservation.)

Either way, poaching remains extremely hard to eradicate. An estimated [30,000 elephants](#) were killed in 2012, the most in three decades. Rhino poaching is also approaching record highs. Much of the recent surge in demand has come from China, where ivory can sell for \$1,000 per pound in some regions.



Ivory tusks are displayed after being confiscated in Hong Kong after a seizure on Jan. 5, 2013. (Kin Cheung/AP)



In a 2010 essay for New Scientist, wildlife trafficking expert Tom Miliken [also pointed to](#) gaps in law enforcement as another major reason for the surge in poaching. African countries that span the elephants' western range make surprisingly few seizures each year. And illicit markets have sprung up all over the world, from Nigeria and Egypt to China and Vietnam. Meanwhile, Asian crime syndicates have played an increasingly large role in moving the ivory from Africa to Asia.

The Fish & Wildlife Services' "ivory crush" is just one of several efforts the United States is making to stem the resurgent trade. Earlier this year, President Obama [pledged](#) \$10 million in aid to Africa to fight poaching and created an inter-agency task force on wildlife trafficking.

