



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

Protecting Communities from Sea Level Rise

Keep the Power Local With Federal Support



Claim and Focus

A clear and precise claim is introduced (“The federal government should provide funding to communities...but the local government must maintain the decision-making power...”) and the whole essay is used to maintain a strong focus on developing it.



Support and Evidence

The essay cites the most relevant and valid evidence from each provided text and quotes evidence from one of the footnoted sources (which is not required, but demonstrates performance above grade-level expectations). Counterclaims are refuted, thorough explanations are given, and full understanding of the topic and texts is demonstrated.



Organization

Clear transitional phrases clarify the relationships between ideas (“To address the problem of sea level rise,” “With guidance from experts like these”) in a way that enhances the argument. A logical progression of ideas is supported by an effective introduction and conclusion.



Language

The essay incorporates language that is appropriate for the complexity of the topic and vivid word choices attend to the reader’s interests (“accelerating,” “functional,” “preserved,” “prioritized”). Sentence structure is consistently varied and a definitive perspective is established.



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

Protecting Communities from Sea Level Rise



Keep the Power Local With Federal Support

To Office of the President of the United States,

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, sea levels rise when the global temperature rises, causing ocean water to expand and large areas of ice to melt. Normally this happens over long periods of time, but the burning of fossil fuels is accelerating global warming and sea levels are rising at an alarming rate. More importantly, this problem is primarily affecting people of color and low-income communities living in coastal cities. To help address this problem, the federal government has provided coastal cities with funding. However, when this funding comes with the requirement that the federal government gets to decide how the money will be spent, the needs of the communities and the people who live there are often overlooked. The federal government should provide funding to communities that face unequal impacts from sea level rise, but the local government must maintain the decision-making power in how that funding will best protect and benefit the community.

When Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, the whole world witnessed how people of color and low-income communities face unequal impacts from sea level rise. The coastal areas of the city that were closest to the sea level were destroyed by flooding, and these areas were primarily home to African-Americans. As stated in the New York Times article, "Don't Repeat the Mistakes of the Katrina Recovery," the national Army Corps' failure to fix the "shoddy levee system" is what caused the widespread flooding in the first place. This shows that when the decision-

making power is held at the federal level, the needs of the local community are ignored. What's worse is that the efforts to rebuild the city did not work to serve and protect the people who lived in these communities. To address the problem of sea level rise, the state of Louisiana developed a "Master Plan" that aimed to help residents, businesses, and coastal areas thrive over the next 50 years. But community members say that it favored big business interests over local neighborhood needs. "The rebuilding of New Orleans was a failure of the federal government. It did not include the very people affected by rebuilding" (Source 2).

Allowing local governments to decide how they will address sea level rise is more likely to directly benefit and include the voices of the people who live there. For example, Ellicott City, Maryland experienced deadly flooding in 2016 and 2018. Its local government took the time to examine multiple proposals and chose one that was both functional and beneficial to the community. The plan cost significantly more than other options, but it preserved the historic downtown district by diverting flood water through a tunnel while also beautifying the city with retention ponds (Source 3). This commitment to serving the needs of the community is not as prioritized when the decision-makers are at the federal level and are concerned more with cutting costs. Additionally, local governments do not have to make these complex decisions alone. Wetlands Watch and The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are two organizations that advise local governments on managing sea level rise (Source 3). With guidance from experts like these, the people who are directly impacted by the unequal effects of sea level rise can decide which solutions will best serve the unique needs of their neighborhoods.

When the federal government engages with the communities they aim to protect, and acknowledges that people of color and low-income communities have been historically absent from government decisions, the outcomes can be inclusive and successful. For instance, in 2020, the national Army Corp of Engineers proposed a

plan to protect the city of Miami from the hurricanes and heavy storms it endures each year. Source 1 explains that the plan protects the city from flooding by raising buildings, constructing storm barriers, and building pump stations to drain storm water. The federal government agreed to fund 65% of the project, but more importantly, they included “local leaders” and “community members” when developing this plan (Source 1). Furthermore, the Federal Emergency Management Agency implemented a new program in 2020 called Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC). This program designates “six percent of disaster costs every year for local projects” in an effort to “decrease the damage of disasters before they happen” (Source 4). Lastly, there is a proposal before Congress titled the Environmental Justice for All Act that “would allow communities to sue companies that are polluting their communities” (Source 4). Through inclusive programs like BRIC and passing the Environmental Justice for All Act, the federal government can support communities while empowering them to address issues of climate justice at the local level.

In summary, people of color and lower income communities have been forced to deal with the impacts of climate change at significantly higher rates than others. The federal government has the power to support these communities with funding and resources and should be willing to do whatever it takes to help its citizens. The power to ultimately decide how that funding should be spent must remain within the community, as the local government exists to protect the people who live there and ensure that the community will prosper for generations to come.