



LESSON PLAN

On the Verge of Displacement



RELATED PHOTO ESSAY

Kara Women Speak

BY JANE BALDWIN



On the Verge of Displacement



Class: 60 minutes

Key Idea

Indigenous communities find their self-sustaining ways of life at risk due to the development of a hydropower dam in southwestern Ethiopia.

Background

This photo essay, *Kara Women Speak*, documents the lives of the Kara tribe living in the Omo River Valley, located in southwestern Ethiopia. The Omo River is the main vein of the Omo River watershed and extends more than 400 miles to feed 90 percent of Lake Turkana’s water, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Kenya. The Kara tribe, with a population between 1,000 and 3,000, are at risk of displacement due to changes in water and land management. The construction of the Gibe III hydroelectric dam, the largest of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa, will affect the entire Omo River watershed, impacting more than 500,000 people in both Ethiopia and Kenya. A watershed, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is “the area of land where all of the water that is under it or drains off of it goes into the same place.” As of early 2015, the dam is nearly complete and the impacts are already visible; its reservoir is filling in, impeding water flow to the river.

The tribes of the Omo River Valley practice “flood retreat cultivation”—using the nutrient-rich silt left along the riverbanks by the receding floodwaters. The dam will drastically alter the Omo River’s flow and decrease this essential flooding. For generations, the indigenous Kara people have grown sorghum, maize, and beans and have grazed livestock on the flood plains; their culture has developed with the seasonal movements of the Omo River. Throughout the watershed, the Ethiopian government has taken ancestral farmland from other indigenous tribes through land-grab maneuvers. The government does not recognize international laws based on human rights declarations intended to protect indigenous and pastoralist communities.* The Kara tribe’s land will also be leased to foreign investors, forcing them to leave without compensation. No longer self-sustaining, they will become dependent on government aid to survive.** Other projected impacts from the Gibe III dam include: widespread hunger, increased armed conflict over scarce resources, disruption of fragile ecosystems and habitats, and the possibility of increased environmental stress due to climate change.***

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- Environmental Science
- Geography
- Modern World Studies

COLLEGE

- African Studies
- Cultural Anthropology
- Environmental Studies
- Geography
- Women’s Studies

THEMES

- Consequences of development
- Cultural displacement
- Human rights
- Role of women in society

MATERIALS

- World map
- Access to the photo essay online (or printed copies of it)

PREPARATION

- (Optional) Make copies of the photo essay



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Over the past decade, photographer Jane Baldwin visited the region and documented the Kara women’s point of view, their harmonious existence within the larger ecosystem, as well as the human rights and environmental issues that threaten their way of life. Baldwin is currently on the board of directors of International Rivers, an organization based in five continents that works to protect rivers, human rights, and fight against destructive river projects. As a photographer, Baldwin is particularly interested in giving voice to people on the verge of displacement from their ancestral land.

*Human Rights Watch, “[Ethiopia: Pastoralists Forced off Their Land for Sugar Plantation.](#)”
June 18, 2012.

**Survival International, “[The Omo Valley Tribes.](#)”

***International Rivers, “[Omo River, Lake Turkana at Risk from Dams and Plantations.](#)”
January 20, 2015.

Connections to National Standards

Common Core English Language Arts. W.9-10.2 and W.11-12.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.2.9-12. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their political, cultural, and economic dynamics.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Geo.6.9-12. Evaluate the impact of human settlement activities on the environmental and cultural characteristics of specific places and regions.

Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2-7. Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.



Lesson

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduce the photo essay by showing Ethiopia and the Omo River Valley on a world map. Point out that the photographer traveled to Ethiopia and the Omo River Valley over the span of a decade to document the Kara women. Explain to students that the Gibe III dam, the second-largest hydroelectric plant in Africa, will impact the livelihood of the Kara people. Hundreds of thousands of lives relying on the Omo River will be drastically changed. [Show these aerial photographs](#) of the Gibe III dam to students. Ask students: Do you think photography can impact consciousness and galvanize us into action? If so, how?

ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Have students work in pairs or small groups to view the photo essay. Explain that students should jot down characteristics of the Kara people's way of life apparent in the photos (for example: food, traditional adornment, social status, relationships to animals, family, celebration, etc.) They should also note any evidence of the outside influences that will put the Kara people on the verge of displacement, as described in the photographer's synopsis and photo captions.

Delving Deeper

1. Ask students to share what they learned about the Kara people and their way of life from the photo essay. What could the Kara people lose from the construction of the Gibe III dam?
2. Lead a discussion with the class about the photo essay with such questions as:
 - What do you think the photographer wants us to know about the Kara women?
 - The construction of the Gibe III dam is thought of by many, including the Ethiopian and Kenyan governments, as a sign of progress. It will provide electrical power to Ethiopia and Kenya. However, the environmental and social impacts of the dam on the Kara people will be devastating. Do you consider the construction of this dam as "progress"? When does progress become dangerous and who gets to decide?



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- Should those affected by development in their country have a voice to communicate their concerns? If so, to what degree should their concerns be considered?
- What do you think is the function of black and white photography in this photo essay? Do you think the photo essay would function the same in color? Why or why not?
- Why do you think the photographer chose the title “Kara Women Speak” for the photo essay? If you could rename the title of this photo essay, what name would you give it? Why?

Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story:

1. View the Omo River Valley region in these [before and after photographs](#) from photographer Jane Baldwin. The photos capture changes to the region over the last six years. What conclusions and comparisons can you draw from these photos? (C3.D2.Geo.2.9-12)
2. An Oxford anthropologist who has spent 40 years working in the Lower Omo Valley states that hundreds of thousands of agro-pastoralists are being evicted from their land along the banks of the Omo River to make way for sugar plantations, according to an article in [The Guardian](#). The Ethiopian government claims that 150,000 jobs will be created. Photographer Jane Baldwin talked to the Kara people who expressed that no one has visited them from the outside. One Kara woman said, “Nobody has come and discussed the issues from the government side. We only hear rumors. There are big changes on the riverside. We hear that people somewhere are going to block the river, but we don’t know where these people are. We are waiting for the river to flood. We need the river to flood so we can plant our sorghum to feed our children. If this river continues going down, down, we have no more life. If we can’t plant sorghum we will die.”

If you were to write a letter to convince the Ethiopian government to stop the construction of the Gibe III dam, what would you write? What evidence from the photos would you describe to back up your argument? (CCSS.ELA.W.9-10.2 and W.11-12.2)



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3. You have been asked to create a community campaign for the International Day of Action for Rivers, celebrated annually on March 14th. Your campaign will educate your community on the importance of dam removals. For research, visit [American Rivers](#), an organization that lists ten reasons in which dams damage rivers. Select three of the reasons that relate to the Omo River Valley which are reflected in the photo essay. Write a convincing slogan that supports your campaign. (NGSS.HS-LS2-7)
4. Writer Robert Hass describes the importance of learning about local watersheds. He said, “Learning about our own watersheds gets to the essence of how we have to understand our homegrounds.” If you had to write a river or watershed story based on where you live, what story would you tell? Does your story illustrate a positive or negative outlook? [Visit the International Rivers website](#) to learn more about their project “Every River Has a Story” and submit your story. (C3.D2.Geo.6.9-12)

Resources

(Website) Jane Baldwin, “[Kara Women Speak.](#)”

[International Rivers.](#)

[American Rivers.](#)

[Friends of Lake Turkana.](#)

John Vidal, “[Ethiopian dam’s ecological and human fallout could echo Aral Sea disaster.](#)” *The Guardian*, March 5, 2014.

“[Survival reports Italian corporation to OECD over dam disaster.](#)” Survival, March 14, 2016.