

# Mining and Indigenous peoples

## (for learners aged 11-18)

Dear educator,

Thank you very much for choosing Survival International's educational resources. A core part of our mission is supporting teachers in introducing Indigenous rights to young people. Our engaging resources are designed to make learning about the struggles and rights of Indigenous peoples accessible and meaningful for students of all ages.

This discussion guide aimed at young people aged 11-18 features videos showing the impact of mining on Indigenous peoples, two case studies showcasing Indigenous communities on the frontline of mining, as well as Indigenous people sharing their views on mining on Indigenous land. It is structured as follows:

1. **Lesson starter ideas – Brainstorming**
2. **Main lesson**
  - a. *Resource 1:* Introductory film about the impact of mining on Indigenous peoples
  - b. *Case studies:* Indigenous peoples on the frontline of mining
    - i. India: Adivasi (Indigenous) peoples' lives and livelihoods are at risk from coal mining
    - ii. Amazon rainforest: lives and livelihood of the Yanomami people at risk from illegal gold mining
  - c. *Resource 2:* Indigenous Voices film "What would we get from mining? Nothing at all"
  - d. Mining and human rights violations of Indigenous peoples
  - e. Mining: does it really bring "development" for Indigenous peoples?
  - f. The role of the industrialized world in environmental destruction
3. **Lesson conclusion – Ways forward**

Before you use this guide with your students, you may want to take a look at our [\*Introduction to Indigenous peoples\*](#) for learners of all ages.

Please feel free to use the materials to best suit your students' needs. All we ask is that you reinforce **three key messages**:

1. There are more than 476 million Indigenous people worldwide, who form part of extraordinarily diverse societies with ways of life that are just as modern as anyone else's. They have technologies, laws, education, religions, and complex social, political, and economic structures. Like all societies, Indigenous peoples continually evolve – embracing tools like mobile phones and social media while adapting their ancestral techniques to challenges such as climate change. This doesn't make them any less Indigenous.
2. Indigenous identity is deeply rooted in their connection to their land. Many Indigenous peoples rely on their land for their livelihoods and are largely self-sufficient. They have developed intricate systems to

live sustainably on their land, fostering strong community ties. Indigenous peoples actively shape and safeguard some of the planet's most biodiverse regions, preserving them for future generations.

3. Indigenous peoples around the globe show remarkable resilience in the face of systemic racism, land theft, forced development, and genocidal violence. They fight tirelessly to defend their rights, territories, and ways of life. Supporting their struggle and standing in solidarity with their pursuit of justice and self-determination is essential.

To learn more about how to teach about Indigenous peoples' rights and struggles in a culturally sensitive manner, we invite you to look at our [Teaching guidance Indigenous peoples: Dos & Don'ts](#).

Your Survival education team

#### **About Survival International**

Survival International is the global campaigning movement for Indigenous peoples' rights. Since 1969, we've been working to prevent their destruction and give them a platform to speak to the world about the genocidal violence, slavery and racism they face on a daily basis. By lobbying the powerful, Survival helps defend the lives, lands and futures of people who should have the same rights as other contemporary societies. Unlike many other organizations, Survival refuses government money and does not take donations from companies that might violate the rights of Indigenous peoples. To learn more, visit [www.survivalinternational.org](http://www.survivalinternational.org)

## 1. Lesson starter ideas

### Word association

Students write down 5 words they associate with the word “mining”. Compare these words with peers and discuss.

### Mining: who benefits, and who is harmed?

Students write a list of who or what they think stands to gain from mining and who or what is harmed by it. Compare these lists with peers and discuss. Highlight to students how often mining happens on Indigenous land for example:

- In the Amazon, mining, both legal and illegal, [is estimated to cover 20% of Indigenous land](#).
- In Australia, the mining giant Anglo American estimates that [60% of mining operations neighbor Aboriginal communities](#).
- India is currently planning a massive expansion of coal mining. Of the 55 new mines planned, 80% of new mining areas would be on Adivasi (Indigenous) land.

## 2. Main lesson

### a. Resource 1: [Introductory film \(3.17 min\)](#)

Click [here](#) to watch a short film introducing students to the idea of the impact of mining on Indigenous peoples.



Use the film as a stimulus to discuss the following questions:

#### Discussion questions

##### a) Indigenous peoples and their relationship with nature

- What feelings or thoughts did the film evoke for you? (Students could use this frame for their answers: *This film made me feel.... because...*)
- What did you learn from the film that's new to you?
- What does the film show about Indigenous peoples' relationship with their environment? How does this compare to industrial models of land use?
- The majority of the world's most biodiverse areas are found within Indigenous lands. Having watched the film, why do you think this is the case?

##### b) The impact of mining on Indigenous peoples

- What did you learn from the film about what Indigenous peoples stand to lose if mining is allowed on their land without their consent?
- Given the devastating impact of mining on Indigenous peoples highlighted in the film, why do you think that governments in many countries continue to allow mining on Indigenous lands without Indigenous consent, even though the harms are so clear? What arguments do you think are used to try and justify this?
- Do you think there are any circumstances in which mining on Indigenous peoples' land without their consent could ever be justifiable? How would you respond to those justifications?
- Indigenous communities whose land is destroyed by mining without their consent are sometimes offered money in compensation. What do you think are the problems with this form of compensation for Indigenous peoples?

#### b. Case studies: Indigenous peoples on the frontline of mining

Across the world Indigenous communities are on the frontline of mining. Here are two current case studies to discuss with your students.

## i. India: Adivasi (Indigenous) peoples' lives and livelihoods are at risk from coal mining



Adivasi men look out on the vast PEKB coal mine that's destroyed much of their ancestral land.

Hasdeo Forest, India © Vijay Ramamurthy

Adivasis, the forest is home, the source of their livelihood, and is sacred. As Balsai, a man from the Gond Adivasi people explains, "Our forest is part of our culture. If the forest survives then our culture and our identity will survive...But if not, our traditions, lifestyle and livelihoods will all be massively affected... What will our future generations do?" Over the last ten years, the Adivasis have repeatedly refused to give their consent for this project, doing everything they can to resist the mining. For example, hundreds of Adivasis from Hasdeo [marched 300km](#) to the state capital to protest.

- To hear from Adivasis on the expansion of coal mining in India, watch the video ["What would we get from mining? Nothing at all"](#) (view Resource 2)
- To learn more about the campaign to #SaveHasdeo [go here](#).

## ii. Amazon rainforest: lives and livelihood of the Yanomami people at risk from illegal gold mining

The [Yanomami](#) are a people of 45,000 living in the forests and mountains of northern Brazil and southern Venezuela.

They live self-sufficiently, using around 500 plants in their day-to-day life for food, medicine, building materials and other uses. This immense botanical knowledge, combined with hunting and fishing, means that the forest provides the Yanomami with everything that they need to thrive.

However, the Yanomami and their way of life are under threat. Thousands of illegal gold miners have invaded Yanomami land, polluting their rivers and ecosystems with highly toxic mercury. This had led to cases of mercury poisoning amongst the Yanomami. The miners are also destroying the forest the Yanomami depend on for their survival – in January 2025 the Yanomami territory had the highest deforestation (in km<sup>2</sup>) out of all Indigenous territories in the Legal Amazon in Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Collective term for numerous Indigenous peoples in India

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://amazon.org.br/en/imprensa/2025-begins-with-68-increase-in-amazon-deforestation/>



Many Yanomami live in large, circular, communal houses called yanos or shabonos. Some can house up to 400 people. © Guilherme Gnipper Trevisan/FUNAI/Hutukara

Miners are also spreading malaria and Covid-19. More than a third of the total Yanomami population may have been exposed to Covid-19, making a lethal combination which is devastating their health and ability to feed themselves. Yanomami children are dying from malaria, pneumonia and malnutrition. What's more, criminal gangs are increasingly active, controlling the gold trade and terrorizing the Yanomami with impunity. As Dario Kopenawa of the Yanomami people explains, "Every day, the Yanomami are intimidated. There's a lot of harassment, death threats, shouting, brandishing guns, shooting with tear gas. The authorities have not complied with our requests [for protection and to remove the miners]. The situation is very tense."

- Hear from Davi Yanomami, Yanomami shaman and leader, in the video ["What we get from mining? Nothing at all"](#) (This video is discussed on page 4 below.)
- To learn more about how Survival International is working to support the Yanomami watch [this video](#).

### c. Resource 2: Indigenous Voices film ["What would we get from mining? Nothing at all"](#) (6.32 min)

Click [here](#) to watch the film in which the following Indigenous people share their views on mining on Indigenous land:



- Davi Yanomami, Brazil
- Melania Canales, Quechua people, Peru
- Aikura, Wajapi people, Brazil
- Lodu Sikaka, Dongria Kondh people, India
- Suhani Bai, Gond people, India
- Mayavati, Gond people, India
- Gedli Bai, Gond people, India

Watch the film closely, identifying whose testimonies cover the topics below, taking notes on what each person says. Discuss:

- A. The impacts of mining on health and well-being of Indigenous peoples
- B. What kinds of environmental destruction brought about by mining are described

- C. What the testimonies reveal about Indigenous peoples' relationship to land and how they defend it
- D. How Indigenous peoples resist mining on their lands

#### d. Mining and human rights violations of Indigenous peoples

Having considered the testimonies of Indigenous people in the film, analyze the following extracts taken from the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. On what grounds do you think mining on Indigenous land without Indigenous peoples' consent can be said to violate Indigenous peoples' fundamental human rights?

- Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.
- Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion... and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.
- Article 22. Everyone, as a member of society... is entitled to realization...of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality
- Article 25. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family

#### e. Mining: does it really bring “development” for Indigenous peoples?

As Melania Canales notes, supporters of mining suggest it brings “development” to Indigenous communities. Having seen the film, what do you think of arguments such as these below?

- World Gold Council [says on its website](#): “Gold mining takes place on every continent except Antarctica and creates exceptional opportunities for local communities.”
- Narendra Modi [has reportedly said that](#): “development” in the form of coal mining would be a “win-win situation for all” which “will ease the lives of tribals”, creating job opportunities for Indigenous people, who would no longer have to migrate for work.

For more on the impact of “development” projects on Indigenous peoples, watch Survival International’s 2-minute animation [There you go!](#)

#### f. The role of the industrialized world in environmental destruction

- In the [Indigenous Voices film](#), Aikura, from the Wajapi people, criticizes industrialized society for its role in causing environmental destruction saying “if white people were on the land, there wouldn’t be any good land left” and explaining how, to his mind, “white people only think about the present not the future.” To what extent do you think these criticisms are fair?
- What important lessons and examples do you think industrialized society would do well to learn from Indigenous peoples?

### 3. Lesson conclusion

#### Ways forward

Discuss the following questions with your students:

- How do you think Indigenous peoples might try and stop mining from going ahead on their land against their will?
- Instead of pursuing a policy of mining on Indigenous land for fossil fuels or metals, what alternatives do you think governments could consider?
- Even in countries where mining in Indigenous territories is prohibited, illegal mining can present a grave problem for Indigenous peoples, as we saw in the case of the Yanomami, Brazil. What

steps do you think governments could take to address illegal mining in their countries and better protect the rights of Indigenous peoples?

- What role do you think human rights organizations like Survival International can play in trying to help stop the mining of Indigenous land without Indigenous consent?
- What do you think you could do to help promote awareness of the rights of Indigenous peoples?

## Learn more about Survival International's work and how to promote Indigenous peoples' rights

We love hearing from you and your students!

- Does your class have questions on this topic? Would they like to have a brief virtual meeting with a Survival International staff member?
- Do you want to have a Survival International staff member speak at a school assembly?
- Would you, your colleagues, or other educators you know, like to receive more Survival International educational materials? We have materials suitable for groups aged 5 to 18 years.
- Would you like your school to be involved in supporting Survival International's work in partnership with Indigenous peoples?

If the answer is yes, then please get in touch with our team at [info@survivalinternational.org](mailto:info@survivalinternational.org).

We can't wait to hear from you!