

Pre-Reading Activities

A: Understanding Words In Context

1. Read the text and say what the words that are in bold mean. The text itself will help you understand some of the words. Do not use your dictionary, but instead use your understanding of the overall text, sentences and any information you know about the word itself (e.g. what form it is) to help you work out a word's meaning. (The words in bold are from today's article.).

There is an **ancient** church and graveyard in the little town. It was built around the 14th century A.D. There is now a **controversial** plan to clear part of the graveyard to make way for a **gleaming** state-of-the-art Tourist Center with a theater, artspace, cyber cafe and craft gallery.

The shiny new development has sparked a **massive** amount of criticism from locals. "We don't want developers here or lots of tourists. We live here because it is **remote** and unspoiled. That's the **key** reason we live here," said one local woman with **frizzy**, untamed hair, wearing a thick winter coat and woolly hat. "The **odd** famous person also lives around here, but most of us are ordinary people. We just want peace and quiet, not busloads of tourists."

Reading Activities

A: Completing A Sentence Summary

Read today's article very quickly, focussing specially on the headline, subheadlines and first five paragraphs. Do not read every word of the article. Complete this sentence summary of the article.

The article is about a mining company wanting to mine the Niyamgiri hills in eastern India and opposition from... (_____ you continue).

Indian tribe defends "hill god" from foreign miner BY SIMON DENYER

LANJIGARH, India, Fri Mar 30 2007 (Reuters) - Their thick, ancient forests shelter leopards, elephants and even the odd tiger, their slopes are home to an isolated tribe, but the "curse" of eastern India's Niyamgiri hills lies beneath the soil.

Massive deposits of bauxite have brought Britain's Vedanta Resources to this remote corner of the state of Orissa, where they have already built a \$900 million alumina refinery. Just a stone's throw from its gleaming new facility, a few hundred people gathered in the shade of mango trees in Lanjigarh in mid-March for the latest protest against the company. Among them, Dickcha Majhi, who walked for five hours from her remote village to the small town, a member of the 8,000-strong Dongria Kondh tribe, who worship an Earth Goddess and revere the hills as their protector Niyam Raja.

"She is our mother and he is our beloved lord," said the small 30-year-old woman, rows of colorful beads around her neck, golden rings through her nose and through her ears, her frizzy hair held down firmly with a dozen metal hair clips. "If you hand the hill over, the hill god will eat us."

As eastern India engages in a headlong but increasingly controversial rush to industrialize and exploit its vast mineral resources, Vedanta's plans to turn the top of the Niyamgiri range into open-cast mines has emerged as a key battleground. It is a battle not about whether to industrialize, but how to do it, and how to compensate the losers. And it is being waged in the courts and in the streets at the same time.

Conservationists say the miners could and should have chosen other hills, instead of risking the rich biodiversity of Niyamgiri, and

have taken the issue to the Supreme Court.

On the ground, tribal farmers worry their traditional lands and livelihoods will disappear once mining begins. They are being coralled by local Congress party politician Bhakta Charan Das, who promises to stage a mass march on the site in mid-April. "By the time they reach here, the site will be gheraoed (encircled) by 50,000 people and the administration will be paralyzed," he threatened.

"BLATANT VIOLATION"

The Wildlife Society of Orissa dismisses Vedanta's pledge to spend millions of dollars protecting wildlife.

"How will they manage the wildlife? Take them out and keep them in five-star hotels?" asked Biswajit Mohanty. "Seventy-three million tons of bauxite will be taken out. You can't mitigate the effects of that."

The Vamsadhara river rises from the range and more than 30 streams from the mining site, providing water which sustains hundreds of thousands of people, conservationists say. Mining will destroy those sources, they argue.

In September 2005, a Supreme Court committee recommended that "the use of forest land in an ecologically sensitive area like the Niyamgiri Hills should not be permitted". It also condemned the Ministry of Environment and Forests for a "blatant violation" of its own guidelines for the refinery to be built without getting clearance to mine in the hills, much of which is protected forest under Indian law.

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(Continued.../.) But Vedanta, along with the state and central governments, have fought back hard. The company says the bauxite lies in the top 25-30 meters of the 1,000 meter-high hills, and promises to protect water sources lower down from contamination. It will fill up pits with residues as it goes along, and plant new trees, said refinery head Sanjeev Zutshi.

The Supreme Court will now refer the case to the Forest Advisory Committee, an expert panel. But that will only happen when the court and the government resolve a separate row about who should sit on that committee.

FORGING AHEAD

In the meantime, Vedanta is forging ahead. The refinery carried out a test run in March. Some of the pillars to carry a conveyor belt from the mine to the plant have already been built.

Zutshi says 17 locals are working in the refinery and 50 more are being trained. Hundreds might get jobs from local contractors as shovel men, to sweep out spillage and drain slurry. But employment for all is simply not possible in an industry which requires small numbers of skilled workers. "There is one big issue which is difficult to address, and that is the issue of employment," he said. "These people unfortunately are not educated at all, most of them are illiterate." Instead Vedanta says it has sponsored health and education in local villages as well as alternative income-generating projects.

But the company's claim to popular support was belied by February's local elections, where Congress-backed candidates running on anti-Vedanta tickets dominated, Das said.

Two hours drive away on a rocky, dirt road, a few Dongria Kondh tribesmen and women sat outside their thatched roof huts, their filthy and malnourished children dressed in rags beside them, berries fermenting in the sun to make homemade liquor.

Vedanta says the mines will not affect the slopes on which these people live, only the summits and ridges which they worship. But already people here fear the worst. "The earth is our mother," said 26-year-old Verang Majhi, rejecting any talk of compensation to leave ancestral lands. "Would you leave your mother for money?"

Later, as dusk drew in and the lights of the refinery dominated the night sky, Reuters visited the village of Bandhaguda, right up against the wall of the plant. Daka Majhi said all 32 men of his village were arrested by police and jailed for seven days last year, with scarcely any food and water, for staging a peaceful protest outside the refinery. Their women were threatened by police while Vedanta completed the wall around the plant, cutting the people off from their pond, cremation grounds and much of their fields, he said.

Zutshi contested that version of events, and said repeated efforts had been made to reach out to the villagers, even offering them resettlement at one point, only to be obstructed by a handful of people who wanted "heaps of money".

Vedanta, he insisted, was not the bully that politician Das made it out to be. Nor could it afford to be. "The days are gone when you can impose yourself, surround yourself with goons and policemen, and browbeat every Tom, Dick and Harry," he said. "It's not going to work, it's not a long-term solution at all".

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B: Reading And Notetaking

You are now going to work in groups and each read about something different in today's article. Form groups of five and each choose ONE of the list below to read about. While you are reading, make notes on what you have chosen.

- * Vedanta (a mining company)
- * local politicians

- * Dongria Kondh (hilltribe)
- * the Indian Supreme Court

- * environmentalists

C: Comprehension

Work in your groups and complete the answers for this table. Use your notes from the article to help your group complete the answers for the topic you read about. (Only refer to the article if you can't find the answer from your notes.)

Vedanta

1. Where is Vedanta Resources from? _____
2. What does Vedanta want to mine? _____
3. What has Vedanta already built? _____
4. What possible benefits for local people could there be from the mining? _____
5. What difficulties might local people have in getting jobs with Vedanta? _____
6. What has Vedanta promised to do to avoid environmental damage? _____
7. In one protest about the refinery how does Vedanta say it acted? _____

Dongria Kondh

1. Where do they live? _____
2. How many people are there in this tribe? _____
3. What does the article say about their religion? _____
4. What does the article say about their present lifestyle? _____
5. What happened in one village close to the refinery according to the article? _____

Indian Supreme Court

1. When ruling on the mining issue, what did the Supreme Court recommend? _____
2. What did it say regarding the Ministry of the Environment and Forests? _____
3. What group has been asked to comment on the disagreement? _____
4. What is the problem with this? _____

Local politicians

1. What party are some of the local politicians from? _____
2. Who is their spokesperson in the article? _____
3. What was organized for April 2007? Why? _____
4. What happened in February 2007? _____
5. According to the article national politicians support the views of the local politicians. **True/False**

Environmentalists

1. Why is the area special for environmentalists? _____
2. What do they feel about mining in the area? _____
3. What happened about the area in the 1990s? _____
4. What has been their reaction to Vedanta's promise to protect the environment? _____
5. What effect do they fear mining will have on local people? _____

D: Making A Diagram

In your groups draw a diagram to show the different groups involved in the dispute over the Niyamgiri hills. Write short descriptions summarizing the concern or involvement of each group. What are the deeper issues that are in conflict?

E: Revising A Sentence Summary

Read today's article more carefully. Look again at your answer for **Reading Activity A**. Try to improve or extend it so it more accurately summarizes the main points of today's article.

Post-Reading Activities

You may do one or more of these.

A: Test Your Understanding

The words you looked at in **Pre-Reading Activity A** have been removed from the first part of the article. Fill the gaps in the text with words from the list.

ancient, controversial, frizzy, gleaming, key, massive, odd, remote

Their thick, 1. _____ forests shelter leopards, elephants and even the 2. _____ tiger, their slopes are home to an isolated tribe, but the "curse" of eastern India's Niyamgiri hills lies beneath the soil.

3. _____ deposits of bauxite have brought Britain's Vedanta Resources to this remote corner of the state of Orissa, where they have already built a \$900 million alumina refinery.

Just a stone's throw from its 4. _____ new facility, a few hundred people gathered in the shade of mango trees in Lanjigarh in mid-March for the latest protest against the company.

Among them, Dickcha Majhi, who walked for five hours from her 5. _____ village to the small town,

a member of the 8,000-strong Dongria Kondh tribe, who worship an Earth Goddess and revere the hills as their protector Niyam Raja.

"She is our mother and he is our beloved lord," said the small 30-year-old woman, rows of colorful beads around her neck, golden rings through her nose and through her ears, her 6. _____ hair held down firmly with a dozen metal hair clips.

"If you hand the hill over, the hill god will eat us."

As eastern India engages in a headlong but increasingly 7. _____ rush to industrialize and exploit its vast mineral resources, Vedanta's plans to turn the top of the Niyamgiri range into open-cast mines has emerged as a 8. _____ battleground.

B: Say It!

Work in small groups. Each student represents one of the viewpoints **Reading Activity B**. Talk for one to two minutes summarizing what your viewpoint is (i.e. what Vedanta's viewpoint is according to the article). Then either i). change roles and repeat the activity or ii). discuss what you think should happen and will happen in this conflict.

C: Share Your Opinion

Work in groups of three or four students. Discuss one or more of the following statement:

- * ***It is not possible for modern industry and commercialism to be in harmony with a traditional lifestyle and values. To what extent do you agree or disagree?***
- * ***Ecotourism has demonstrated that it is possible for money to be made out of areas of environmental significance while the area itself is preserved. Industry is now recognizing the necessity of treating the environment with sensitivity rather than using a 'slash and burn' approach. To what extent do you agree or disagree?***
- * ***A government should not decide for a particular group whether an indigenous population's land is to be preserved or developed. It is for that group of people to decide. It is also their right, not the government's, to decide whether they wish to modernize or remain as they are. To what extent do you agree or disagree?***

TEACHERS' NOTES AND ANSWER KEY

Reading Activities

A: Completing A Sentence Summary - Notes

Students work alone to complete this summary having skimmed the article to grasp the main points. They are not expected to produce as full an answer as the one given below but their answer should show that they have some understanding of the issue and the groups involved. You may like them to compare answers in pairs or small groups. At this stage there is no need to show them the sample answer.

A: Completing A Sentence Summary - Sample Answer

The article is about a mining company wanting to mine the Niyamgiri hills in eastern India and opposition from...a tribe of hillspeople, local politicians and environmentalists who fear the mining will be detrimental to the livelihood of locals, as well as wildlife, and despoil a sacred site.

B: Reading And Note-taking - Notes

Students are in groups of five and each takes one of the topics listed. They read the article looking for any mention of their topic and taking fairly comprehensive notes. These notes will be used for the next activity. Any student who finishes early may read the article again looking at a different topic.

If your class won't be easily divided into groups of five, assign more than one topic to a student (e.g. local politicians and the Supreme Court could both be assigned to one student.) In a one-to-one situation you could perhaps split the different sections between you and the student or do some in the session and assign others for homework (the key ones are for Vedanta and the Dongria Kondh.)

C: Comprehension - Notes

Students need to use the notes they made in the previous activity to help their group answer the questions. They can look at the article if they need to but hopefully their notes will be fairly comprehensive so that they can work through most of the questions fairly quickly. Some of the questions are more difficult than others and you may want to do a quick check of them at the end. Everyone in the group should write down the answers for this activity so there should be a lot of negotiation of meaning and information sharing as each member of the group takes a turn in answering the questions while all the students write the answers down.

C: Comprehension - Sample Answers

Vedanta

1. Britain, 2. bauxite, 3. a refinery, 4. employment, sponsored health and education, 5. mining requires skilled workers. Most of the locals are illiterate and unskilled, 6. protect wildlife, plant trees and fill up pits, 7. when people in Bandhaguda protested against the building of the refinery Vedanta says it offered them resettlement. Vedanta says it is not acting like a bully.

Dongria Kondh

1. in the Niyamgiri hills in the state of Orissa, 2. 8,000, 3. they worship the Earth Goddess as their mother and believe the hills is their protector Niyam Raja, they worship the summits and ridges of the hills, 4. they live an isolated life, many are illiterate, the children of one group are described as filthy, malnourished and dressed in rags with their families living in thatched huts. The example of one woman who walks five hours to a town to join the protest is given, 5. in the village of Bandhaguda the reporter learns that people were arrested and jailed after protesting peacefully. The wall of the refinery cut them off from the pond, cremation grounds and fields.

Indian Supreme Court

1. the use of land in such an ecologically sensitive area should not be allowed, 2. that the Ministry had violated its own rules in allowing the refinery to be built without first obtaining permission for mining in the area, 3. the Forest Advisory Committee, 4. the Supreme Court and government must first agree on who will be on the committee.

Local politicians

1. the Congress Party, 2. Bhakta Charan Das, 3. a mass march on the site of the mining dispute to try to paralyze the administration, 4. There were local elections and Congress candidates (who are anti-mining) dominated the elections, 5. false. (the article says the central and state governments along with Vedanta have fought criticism from the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Environment and Forests violated 'its own guidelines' in allowing the refinery to be built before obtaining permission for mining in the hills).

Environmentalists

1. it is an elephant corridor, the only home of the golden gecko in Orissa, it is an area which has rich biodiversity, it shelters leopards and some tigers, 2. It should not happen. 3. The area was proposed as a wildlife sanctuary, 4. they don't believe the company would be able to do this, 5. it could destroy water sources from more than 30 streams which sustains hundreds of people.

D: Making A Diagram - Notes

Answers will vary, but all the groups from the previous activity should be shown in the diagram.

E: Revising A Sentence Summary - Notes

Students should look again at their answers for Reading Activity A and revise them in the light of their deeper understanding of today's article. If you prefer, students could instead look at the sample answer provided in this answer key for Reading Activity A and see whether they can improve it in any way. They may, for example, point out that the article states that the disagreement is over how to industrialize, not whether to industrialize.

The deeper issues include religion and respect for sacred sites, development versus maintaining the status quo and respecting a people's traditional way of life, national and state versus local politics, how to compensate and environmental concerns.

Post-Reading Activities

B: Test Your Understanding - Answers

1. ancient, 2. odd, 3. massive, 4. gleaming, 5. remote, 6. frizzy, 7. controversial, 8. key.