



**New  
Internationalist**

# Conservation – good or bad?

New Internationalist Intermediate + Ready Lesson:  
speaking / reading / vocabulary / writing a formal letter / linkers

Discuss / make notes:

**'Conservation is good'**

- yes or no?

- why / why not?

# Match photos and descriptions:

1/



2/



3/



a) WWF has been working in the Congo Basin for over 20 years. WWF has supported eco-guards who have committed violent abuse against tribal people. ©WWF

b) A man from a village near the proposed Messok Dja national park shows where the eco-guards beat him. *Credit: Fiore Longo*

c) Conservation projects have stolen a lot of land from tribal people and local communities. The projects say that this is necessary for conservation. That is wrong. *Credit: Fiore Longo*

Conservation projects have stolen a lot of land from tribal people and local communities. The projects say that this is necessary for conservation. That is wrong. *Credit: Fiore Longo*



WWF has been working in the Congo Basin for over 20 years. WWF has supported eco-guards who have committed violent abuse against tribal people. ©WWF



A man from a village near the proposed Messok Dja national park shows where the eco-guards beat him. *Credit: Fiore Longo*



# What do you think?

1. Where were the first national parks?
2. Who lived there when white people 'discovered' the areas?
3. Why is 'discovered' in inverted commas?
4. What are some problems associated with these national parks?
5. Who benefits most from this type of conservation?

## Read these 2 slides to answer the questions:

The first national parks were in the United States in the 19th century. The idea was that nature is 'untouched wilderness' until white people 'discovered' it.

Chief Luther Standing Bear is from the Sicangu and Oglala Lakota. He says, 'Nature was a "wilderness" only to the white man. White men said it was full of "wild" animals and "savage" people. To us it was tame, not wild.' Thousands of Native American people were not 'just' living on the land, but using and looking after it. They played a very important part in these ecosystems and understood them very well. But people saw the Native Americans as a problem to solve, just like the peoples in African and Asian protected areas today.

The sad story is that tourism, trophy hunting, and 'sustainable' logging and mining are often welcome in the areas where they have stopped the original inhabitants from living and using the land.

Both in 19th century North America and in much of Africa and Asia today, 'conservation' means the original people cannot live on their own lands. But tourists can come there on holiday. Local people cannot hunt for food in places where foreigners hunt for sport. The word 'sustainable' here means to allow logging and mining on 'protected' land. The idea that indigenous peoples don't understand how to look after their lands comes from cultural imperialism. We know that across the world land rights for indigenous communities produces as good as or better conservation with very low cost.

People who care about the planet must stop supporting 'conservation' projects that destroy indigenous and tribal peoples. It's time for conservation to see them as senior partners in the fight to protect their own land: for their tribes, for nature, and for us all.

## Vocabulary – match:

**1/ untouched wilderness**

**2/ savage**

**3/ tame**

**4/ ecosystem**

**5/ trophy hunting**

**6/ sustainable**

**7/ logging and mining**

**8/ indigenous**

**9/ cultural imperialism**

**10/ conservation**

- a) shooting big animals to get the horns or skin – something to show others
- b) when one community forces its culture onto another weaker community
- c) wild
- d) the business of cutting trees and getting minerals
- e) domestic / not wild
- f) land in its original, natural condition
- g) the protection of plants, animals and nature
- h) a big group of living organisms that interact together
- i) native
- j) something that protects, not damages the environment

# KEY:

1/ untouched wilderness

2/ savage

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i) native

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# Do you know of any positive or negative examples of conservation?

1/ Which places in the world do you think need conservation projects? Why?

2/ Who do you think should be responsible for these projects? Why?

3/ What do you think is the best use of money raised by conservation charities such as WWF (World Wildlife Fund)? Why?

# Reading 2: an example from the Baka tribe

Before reading, try to predict the answers:

**1/ Where do the Baka tribe live?**

**2/ Why have the Baka tribe suffered?**

**3/ How have the Baka tribe suffered? List at least 4 problems**

**3/ Who paid for the 'conservation'?**

**4/ Which organisation(s) protect and support the Baka tribe?**

Now read the next 2 slides to find the answers

In February 2020, *The Guardian* newspaper saw a report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that armed eco-guards were violent to Baka tribespeople and violated their human rights. The WWF paid for some of this to protect wildlife in the Republic of Congo.

The big conservation organisation has tried to create a protected zone around Messok Dja, a big forest rich in wildlife and biodiversity. The Baka people have lived there for generations. The UNDP found that no one spoke to the Baka about the project and they suffered serious violence from the eco-guards. The eco-guards also stopped them from going to the forests for food and medicines.

The WWF, palm oil and logging companies, and the UNDP help to pay for the \$21.4 million conservation project. A big part of this money goes to 'conservation' in Messok Dja. The rest of the money goes to TRIDOM, another forest across Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, and Gabon. The UNDP started an investigation after receiving letters from the Baka in 2018 and complaints from Survival International (SI).

One letter, signed by Baka people in Mbaye village, said: 'They stop us from going to the forest. If we make camps in the forest, the eco-guards burn them down. Many Baka are dead today. Children are getting thinner. We already have very few forest medicines. We tried to tell our difficulties to the WWF but they do not accept them. They just tell us we cannot go to the forest.' A report from the investigation, dated 6 January 2020, says eco-guards beat Baka men, women, and children. Other reports say eco-guards forced Baka to beat each other at gun point, guards took away machetes, and eco-guards forced Baka women to take off their clothes 'to be like naked children'.

The report also says, 'The violence is leading to suffering in the Baka communities. It is also stopping the Baka from living their normal lives.'

Unfortunately, this is only a small part of the story. It is shocking how long WWF have known about this and done so little to put it right. It is also shocking how until now international organisations like the UN paid no attention to what was happening.

'Eco-guards see Baka as animals, they don't see us as humans,' a Baka man from the Congo Basin told Survival International.

Survival International and the indigenous and tribal people have been protesting since the 1980s against the violence of conservation. Nature groups, national governments, and international organisations have supported agents who have tortured and murdered many innocent and vulnerable people. Park rangers and government officials have burned down villages, knocked down houses, gang-raped women, stolen possessions, beaten people, and injured them for life.

Conservation projects have stolen a lot of land from tribal people and local communities. The projects say that this is necessary for conservation. That is wrong. The stolen land is then called a 'protected area' or 'national park', and they keep out the people living there, sometimes with violence, like with the Baka.

What do you think now? – has your opinion changed?:

**Conservation is good**

- yes or no?

- why / why not?

# Let's write a letter to WWF about this?

**Which of these phrases would you like to use in your letter? And why?**

- a) I am writing to complain about your cultural imperialism.
- b) I have recently read an article in New Internationalist about the Baka tribe in The Republic of Africa.
- c) You must stop killing people in forests around the world.
- d) I would like to suggest that you stop supporting the type of conservation project that harms indigenous people.
- e) I am looking forward to receiving a positive response soon.
- f) Please write back to me soon – I'd love to hear from you.

## Now correct the errors in these useful phrases for formal letters:

- a) I am writing a complain about violent conservation.
- b) I have find out a lot of information about the topic.
- c) I know that Baka tribe is one that has suffered a great deal.
- d) One of the way they have suffered is through being beaten.
- e) I suggest you to find different ways to do conservation projects.
- f) There are many other possibility of protecting forests.
- g) I am looking forward to receive your reply and hearing how you intend to change this situation.

# Did you find these errors?:

- a) I am writing **a complaint / to complain** about violent conservation.
- b) I have **found** out a lot of information about the topic.
- c) I know that **the** Baka tribe is one that has suffered a great deal.
- d) One of the **ways** they have suffered is through being beaten.
- e) I **suggest you find** different ways to do conservation projects.
- f) There are many other **possibilities** of protecting forests.
- g) I am looking forward to **receiving** your reply and hearing how you intend to change this situation.

Linkers to contrast – can you use the following to write sentences about conservation?:

however, although, despite, nevertheless, in spite of, even though

Remember:

1/ 'However', and 'nevertheless' usually start a new sentence.

eg. We want to protect forests. However, this is not always easy.

2/ Despite / in spite of are followed by a noun phrase (or, if you want to follow them with a verb clause, add 'the fact that')

eg. Despite the efforts of conservation organisations, forest are still being destroyed.

3/ Although / even though are followed by a verb clause

eg. Although local people are best to protect the forests, they are not always allowed to.

# Now write your letter:

Remember:

- 1/ **plan** – your ideas – and divide them into paragraphs
- 2/ **format** – put both addresses (yours and theirs) and the date
- 3/ **opening** – why are you writing? ‘I’m writing to ...’
- 4/ include **complex language** eg. conditional, passive, relative clauses
- 5/ include **linkers** eg. previous slide
- 6/ how to **finish** your letter – what do you want them to do?
- 7/ **check** very carefully for errors (check on error slide)

# Homework:

1/ Write your formal letter

2/ Read more eg. the original article about

conservation: <https://newint.org/features/2020/03/03/violence-conservation>

3/ Read more about conservation eg. put 'conservation' in the top right search box at: [eewiki.newint.org](http://eewiki.newint.org) and read some articles that appear

4/ Listen to some TED talks about conservation:

<https://www.ted.com/talks?sort=relevance&q=conservation>