

H ORIGINAL

LIFE AFTER PEOPLE™

STUDY GUIDE

H
HISTORY.

LIFE AFTER PEOPLE™

About the Series

For thousands of years, humans have been conquering the planet. But what would happen to the most important things in the modern world if people suddenly disappeared? What will rise and what will fall? What does it say about how the modern world works, and how powerful nature can be... when no one's around to conquer it? How do water, sand, fire, and foliage reclaim the planet? The series uses the most cutting-edge visual effects to provide a detailed picture of a post-human future, revealing the fate of structures like the Statue of Liberty, the Las Vegas Strip, the Pyramids, and creatures that might inherit the places we once lived.

Curriculum Links

Life After People would be useful for Social Studies, Environmental Studies, Current Events, and Culture and Society courses. It is appropriate for high school students.

Learn more about the series here: <https://www.history.com/shows/life-after-people>

For The Educator

Life After People is a speculative documentary series that explores what would happen to Earth's cities, ecosystems, infrastructure, and wildlife in the complete absence of human life. While fictional in premise, the series draws on real science, engineering, environmental studies, and urban planning to demonstrate how quickly the natural world could reclaim the built environment.

We encourage educators to use this guide as a resource to support both individual and group-based learning.

Terms to Define

Students can define these terms during or after watching the episodes:

- Environment
- Decay
- Invasive Species
- Urban Infrastructure
- Rewilding
- Ecosystem Recovery
- Preservation
- Sustainability



Discussion Questions

1. What does the term “environment” mean to you? Does it have more than one meaning?
2. What are some of the things that happen when places are abandoned? What does this suggest about how humans interact with and maintain the places they inhabit?
3. What natural forces begin to take over when human systems shut down? How quickly do these changes occur?
4. Give examples of how buildings and infrastructure decay over time without maintenance? What kind of materials break down fastest and why?
5. What happens to wildlife and plant life when people no longer exist? How do ecosystems shift or evolve in our absence?
6. What are some of the risks that come with relying too much on technology to support daily life or protect cities from disasters?
7. What are some of the ways societies can preserve their landscapes by removing old structures responsibly?
8. How might thinking about a world without people help us make better choices about how we build, consume, and preserve?
9. How might cities and communities responsibly manage old or failing structures that are most vulnerable to environmental collapse?
10. What is one key insight or new idea you took away from this series?

DID YOU KNOW?

- During the Blitz of London, Nazis dropped more than 26 million pounds of bombs on the city, and many of them never exploded.
- The coldest temperature ever recorded in Minnesota is -60°F.
- Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil weighs twice as much as the Statue of Liberty even though it is only half as tall.

Related Activity #1

City Vulnerability Report

Students will work in small groups to research and present a brief “vulnerability report” on a real-world city, imagining how it would survive or fall apart without human maintenance.

Divide into groups and assign or allow students to choose a city.

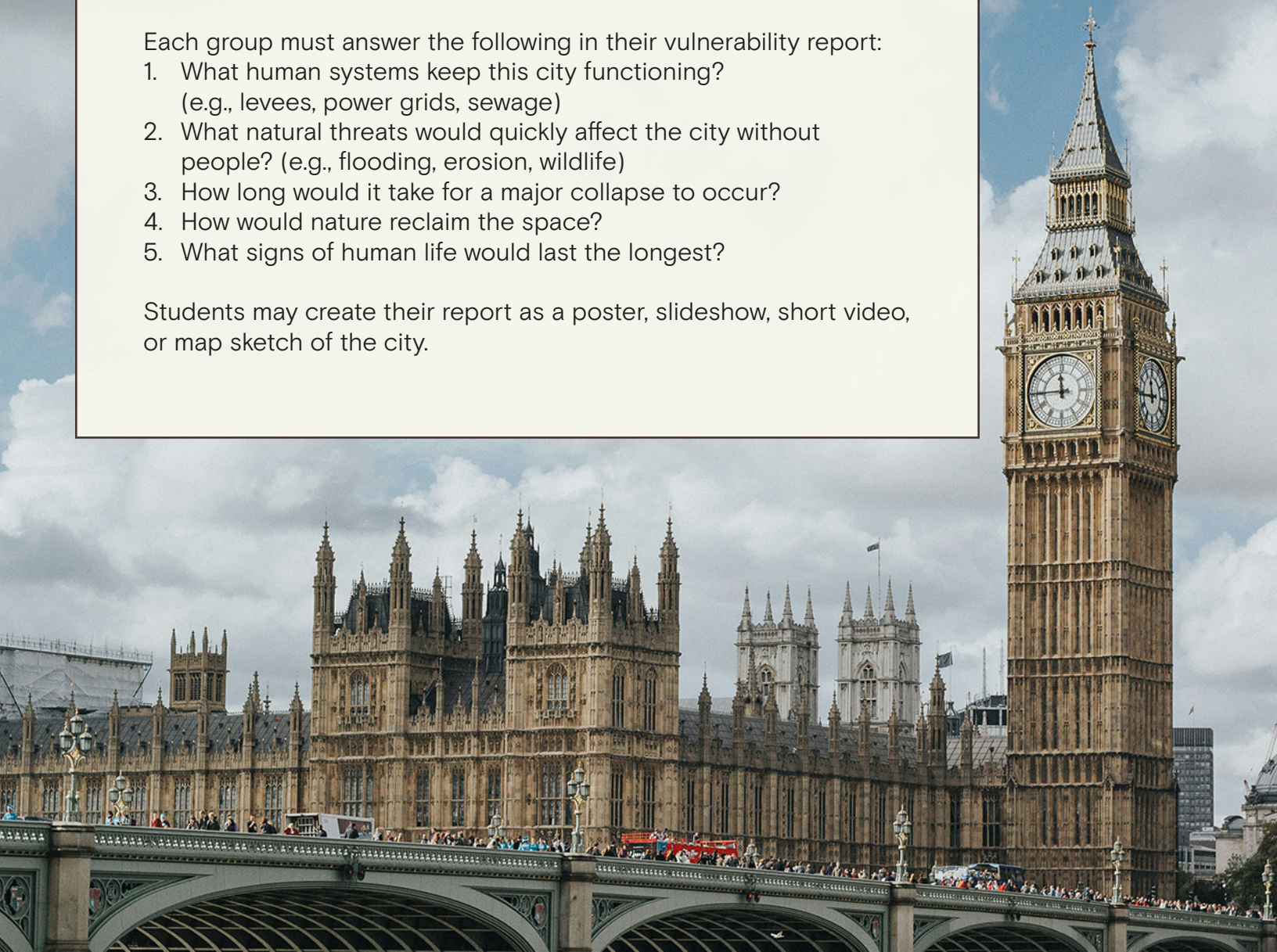
- Venice, Italy
- Amsterdam, Netherlands
- New York City, USA
- Tokyo, Japan
- Dubai, UAE
- Los Angeles, USA
- Cairo, Egypt

Research & Analyze:

Each group must answer the following in their vulnerability report:

1. What human systems keep this city functioning?
(e.g., levees, power grids, sewage)
2. What natural threats would quickly affect the city without people? (e.g., flooding, erosion, wildlife)
3. How long would it take for a major collapse to occur?
4. How would nature reclaim the space?
5. What signs of human life would last the longest?

Students may create their report as a poster, slideshow, short video, or map sketch of the city.



Related Activity #2

Time-Lapse Art Activity

Students will explore how nature re-claims human-built environments over time by creating a visual or written time-lapse of one location abandoned by people.

1. Choose a Location

Each student (or group) will choose one of the following man-made locations to focus on:

- Grocery store
- Mega mall
- Shipping port
- Suburban shopping plaza
- Warehouse delivery fulfillment center

2. Create a 4-Stage Time-Lapse:

Students will create a comic strip illustrating what their site would look like in:

- 1 week without humans
- 1 year
- 10 years
- 100 years

This can be done on paper or using a digital formatting program (like Google Slides, Canva, or Storyboard That)

For each stage, they must include:

1. New animal or plant life entering the scene (e.g., barn owls, rats, vines)
2. Structural changes (e.g., roof collapse, mold, rust)
3. Breakdown of human technology (freezers thawing, lights failing)
4. Shifts in ecosystem or purpose (e.g., mall turns into forest, port becomes bird sanctuary)



Writing Activities

1. Choose a modern city and write a fictional journal entry from the perspective of the last person to leave it. Describe the moment of departure, the systems you know will soon fail, and what you predict will happen to the city in the years after.
2. Write a persuasive editorial calling for greater investment in sustainable infrastructure (like flood defenses, public transportation, or green energy). Use the series as evidence for what can happen when human systems fail or are abandoned.
3. Imagine you are a historian or scientist living 200 years in the future after the collapse of human civilization. Write a journal article detailing what physical evidence remains and what it tells us about the way people lived.
4. Write a reflection about what surprised you the most while watching the documentary. What do you think society can do differently to ensure a more sustainable future? What do you think you can do as an individual in your everyday life to be more sustainable?



Watch **LIFE AFTER PEOPLE**

<https://www.history.com/shows/life-after-people>

Related Content

Article: SS Richard Montgomery Background

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-ss-richard-montgomery-information-and-survey-reports/ss-richard-montgomery-background-information>

Article: New Orleans

<https://www.history.com/articles/new-orleans>

Article: Invasive Species Nutria in New Orleans

<https://loopnola.org/blog-1/2024/2/29/invasive-species-spotlight-the-nutria>

Article: What is Ecosystem Restoration?

<https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/what-ecosystem-restoration>

Article: New Orleans Map Study

[New Orleans Map Study](#)

Further Reading

Mother Nature Is Trying To Kill You, by Daniel Riskin

Close to Home: The Wonders of Nature Just Outside Your Door, by Thor Hanson

My First Book of Earth: All About Our Planet for Kids, by Stephanie Manka Schuttler

Parable of the Sower, by Octavia Butler

[The Challenge of Predicting the Shear Strength of Very Thick Slabs](#), by Michael P. Collins, Evan C. Bentz, Phillip T. Quach, and Giorgio T. Proestos

[Along-Wind Load Effects on Tall Buildings: Comparative Study of Major International Codes and Standards](#), by Yin Zhou, Tracy Kijewski, and Ahsan Kareem