

Central Africa: Niyah Needs Energy | Lesson Plan

How does access to reliable energy change what a person can do with their time, health, and future?

Students will understand that reliable energy is a foundation for human flourishing—shaping how people spend their time, their health outcomes, and their future opportunities.

Learning Objectives:

- Locate and identify the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on a map of Africa, label neighboring countries and major bodies of water, and describe the Congo region's geographic and cultural significance.
- Analyze graphs on Africa's electricity generation sources to identify trends in energy use, including fossil fuels vs. renewables.
- Describe how Niyah's daily life is shaped by her family's values, the lack of electricity, and her community's reliance on traditional energy sources.
- Analyze how energy poverty influences health, education, environment, and economic opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Explain the connection between access to reliable energy and human flourishing, including time management, health improvements, and future aspirations.
- Reflect on how innovation, policy changes, and personal initiative can address energy challenges and promote sustainable solutions.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Sub-Saharan Africa:** A geographic region of Africa lying south of the Sahara Desert.
- **Congo (Congo Basin) region:** A region of Central Africa centered on the Congo River basin and covered largely by tropical rainforest.
- **Virunga National Park:** A national park in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo created to protect wildlife and habitats.
- **World Health Organization (WHO):** A specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for coordinating international public health.
- **Poverty:** A condition of economic hardship marked by insufficient income or resources to meet basic living needs.
- **Fossil fuel:** A carbon-based energy source formed from ancient organic matter, such as coal, oil, or natural gas.
- **Nuclear power:** A method of generating electricity by using energy released from atomic nuclei, typically through fission in a reactor.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.5, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.6

Academic Subject Areas: Geography, Economics, Civics & Public Policy, Public Health, Global Studies, Global Awareness, Culture



What You'll Need

- Video: *Around the World: Niyah Needs Energy* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Around the World: Niyah Needs Energy* (Click [Here](#))
- Access to computers or devices for research (optional for extensions).
- World map or globe for geography tie-in.
- Visual aids: Images of sub-Saharan Africa, mountain gorillas, Congolese foods, or energy sources.

Lesson Plan (Two 45-minute Class Periods)

Part 1: Reading the Book (20-25 min)

Note to Teachers:

- We recommend beginning the lesson with a sustained, uninterrupted read-aloud of *Around the World: Niyah Needs Energy* while students follow along on their devices or printed copies. This will take 20-25 minutes.
- This method is intentional—it rebuilds attention spans, immerses students in meaningful narrative, and restores a lost tradition: attentive listening. If possible, resist the temptation to break up the reading into smaller sessions.
- Encourage students to follow along with a pencil in hand and mark moments they find surprising, confusing, or important. After reading, allow a few moments for quiet reflection or discussion before beginning Part 2 of the lesson plan.

Part 2: Geography Focus (10-15 min)

1. Activity: Use the **Geography Focus** section of the worksheets—Map of Africa and the Middle East and Graphs—to guide students through a hands-on mapping and analysis activity. Students will locate and label the DRC, neighboring countries, bodies of water, and directions on the map. They will also analyze graphs on Africa's electricity sources to identify trends.
2. Discuss the following questions:
 - Why is the Congo region's location important to the story and the challenges Niyah faces?
 - How does living near Virunga National Park affect Niyah's community, both positively and negatively?
 - What do the graphs reveal about Africa's reliance on certain energy sources, and how does this connect to Sub-Saharan Africa's energy poverty?

Part 3: Vocabulary Focus and Sentence Writing (5-10 min)

- Vocabulary Focus: Introduce and define the key vocabulary terms listed in the worksheet (e.g., Sub-Saharan Africa, Congo region, WHO, poverty, fossil fuel, nuclear power). Discuss how these terms show up in the story and impact the characters. Teacher note: You may choose to pre-teach these words or explore them after reading, using the worksheet section.

- Sentence Writing and Comprehension: Have students match terms to definitions and write sentences using these terms to connect them back to Niyah's story. This is a flexible section that allows for differentiation and scaffolding for students.

Part 4: Systems, Struggles, and Solutions (20-25 min)

- Activity: Use the Cause & Effect Chart in the worksheet to help students connect events in the story to the broader systems that shape Niyah's experience (e.g., energy infrastructure, poverty cycles, or environmental resource use). These systems are the core focus of Niyah Needs Energy and can be discussed beforehand or used as a helpful guide if students get stuck:
 - Lack of Electricity Access
 - How it shows up: Niyah spends hours collecting water and wood; no school due to family labor needs; reliance on open fires for cooking.
 - Result: Limited education, wasted time on survival tasks, hindered dreams of becoming a businesswoman.
 - Deforestation and Environmental Strain
 - How it shows up: Villagers cut trees near Virunga National Park for fuel; threats to gorillas and wildlife.
 - Result: Endangered habitats, potential legal risks (breaking park laws), and long-term loss of forests.
 - Health and Pollution Risks
 - How it shows up: Indoor wood burning, like "burning 400 cigarettes an hour" (WHO stat); diesel generators in cities cause noise and air pollution.
 - Result: High death rates (439,000 Africans/year from indoor pollution), coughing, lung damage, and health issues for families like Niyah's.
 - Economic Poverty and High Energy Costs
 - How it shows up: Low wages (\$2/day); high connection fees (\$300) and electricity costs; fallback to generators or dung.
 - Result: a cycle of poverty, unaffordable modern energy, and stunted community development.
- Small Group or Partner Work: Students identify 2–3 problems Niyah faces and connect them to a system described in the story (using the chart). Then explain how that system affects Niyah and her family or community. Encourage them to consider root causes, such as inadequate infrastructure investment.
- Whole-Class Debrief: Guide a discussion using these questions:
 - What system caused the biggest challenge in Niyah's story? (e.g., Is it the lack of energy infrastructure, or how poverty makes it hard to build one?)
 - What are some potential solutions to these challenges? (e.g., Building better power plants, like what Joseph wants to do, or policies to lower energy costs.)
- Teacher Note: This activity encourages students to recognize how human agency and innovation (e.g., new energy technologies or community efforts) can improve desperate situations caused by systemic gaps like poor infrastructure.

Part 5: Personal Reflection / Writing Activity (20-25 min)

- Activity: Have students complete the Reading Comprehension and Personal Reflection section of the worksheet. This portion reinforces key plot points and encourages students to think critically about poverty, the lack of electricity, and what might need to change.
- Teacher Guidance:
 - Review the comprehension questions aloud or in small groups to check understanding before students begin writing.
 - Encourage students to refer to specific moments from the story in their answers.
 - For the reflection prompt, give students quiet time to think before writing. Emphasize honesty and effort over length.
 - Optional: Invite volunteers to share their reflections with the class to build connection and discussion.

Don't have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (25 minutes)

Step 1: Watch the *Around the World: Niyah Needs Energy* video together as a class.

Step 2: Lead a focused discussion using the following guiding questions:

- What were some of the biggest challenges Niyah faced in her community?
- How did the lack of electricity affect her daily life?
- What are some possible solutions?

Optional Extension: Distribute the worksheet and invite students to complete one or two sections independently, such as the Vocabulary Focus & Sentence Writing or the Cause & Effect Chart, as a follow-up or homework assignment.