

Worldview 2012 @Wexner Center for the Arts

Teacher Resources for the Island President



"Powerful... compelling and thought provoking. THE ISLAND PRESIDENT is heartening and unsettling by turns."
- Kenneth Turan, *LOS ANGELES TIMES*

"Jon Shenk's fascinating documentary feature THE ISLAND PRESIDENT personalizes the threat of global warming, and nationalizes it too."- Joe Morgenstern, *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Synopsis

Jon Shenk's *The Island President* is the story of President Mohamed Nasheed of the Maldives, a man confronting a problem greater than any other world leader has ever faced—the literal survival of his country and everyone in it. After bringing democracy to the Maldives after thirty years of despotic rule, Nasheed is now faced with an even greater challenge: as one of the most low-lying countries in the world, a rise of three feet in sea level would submerge the 1200 islands of the Maldives enough to make them uninhabitable.

The Island President captures Nasheed's first year of office, culminating in his trip to the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, where the film provides a rare glimpse of the political horse-trading that goes on at such a top-level global assembly. Nasheed is unusually candid about revealing his strategies—leveraging the Maldives' underdog position as a tiny country, harnessing the power of media, and overcoming deadlocks through an appeal to unity with other developing nations. When hope fades for a written accord to be signed, Nasheed makes a stirring speech which salvages an agreement. Despite the modest size of his country, Mohamed Nasheed has become one of the leading international voices for urgent action on climate change.

(From www.islandpresident.com)

Themes to Explore

- **Environmental and Political Issues in Maldives**
- **Environmental Activism**
- **Climate Change**
- **Environmental Refugees**
- **Tourism and Environment**
- **Environmental Justice**
- **Environmental Politics**

ABOUT MALDIVES

Maldives is situated in the Indian Ocean, 210 miles southwest of India and stretching 450 miles south past the Equator.

It is an archipelago of approximately 1200 coral islands of which 200 are inhabited. The number rises to 2000 when including all landforms like sandbanks and reefs that are exposed at low tide.

It is the lowest country on earth: average elevation is 1.5 meters above sea level; highest point is 2.5 meters; 80% of the land is less than 1 meter above sea level.



The low level of the Maldives makes it very sensitive to sea level rise, with some scientists fearing that it could be under water by 2050 or 2100.

Maldives has 400 miles of coastline.

Population: nearly 400,000, a quarter of whom live in the capital island, Male.

You can visit <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5476.htm> for more detailed Information about the geography, people, government, economy, history, economy and environment.

SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES IN MALDIVES

Maldives is a former British Protectorate that gained full independence in 1965. The Republic of Maldives has been led by three Presidents since independence. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom had a thirty year old regime in which he had the power to appoint all members of the Cabinet and judiciary (European Union, 2008), and he was seen by some '... as a dictator who would never relinquish his power' (Alcantara, 2008).

- Amir Ibrahim Nasir (1968-1978)
- Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (1978- 2008)
- Mohamed Nasheed (2008-2012)
- Mohamed Waheed Hussain (February 2012 – present)

1. Political History of Maldives

Link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12653969>

Description: This article presents a succinct overview of the key political events in the political history of Maldives.

2. Democracy Maldives Website

Link: <http://www.democracymaldives.com/>

Description: This website has all the latest news and updates, about the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and the ongoing democratic movement in the Maldives. The video section also has links to videos of President Mohamed Nasheed's appearances around the world, as well as videos of the Director of the documentary film *The Island President*.

3. The politics of tourism: A perspective from the Maldives

Link: http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/25378/1/MPRA_paper_25378.pdf

Description: This paper describes the dynamic nature of the relationship between politics, tourism and religious radicalism in the tropical islands of Maldives.

4. President Mohammed Nasheed in an interview with Renee Montagne on NPR

Link: <http://www.npr.org/2012/02/21/147180181/ex-maldives-president-blames-coup-for-his-leaving-office>

Description: In this interview President Mohammed Nasheed talks about the political coup behind his resignation and the current political situation in the Maldives.

5. April 2nd 2012 President Mohamed Nasheed's Appearance on the Jon Stewart Show and the David Letterman Show

Link:

- <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-april-2-2012/mohamed-nasheed>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7GTIb-iasE>

Description: A short video clip of President Nasheed's appearance on the Jon Stewart show. The President talks about the dictatorship, need for democracy and the climate change issues in Maldives.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN MALDIVES

1. Rising sea level in Maldives

Link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/rising-sea-levels-in-the-maldives/3192.html>

Description: A news report on the effects of sea level rise on the Maldives. The oceans are rising by 9mm per year, meaning the islanders may have to abandon their homes before the end of the century. There are new efforts to stop the coral islands from being lost beneath the waves. Sea walls hold back the water and new land is being reclaimed from the sea. Global warming remains a threat.

2. The tourism industry and how it exacerbates the environmental issues

Link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jan/03/maldives-thilafushi-rubbish-landfill-pollution>

Description: This is a news article on the guardian website that describes the environmental crisis of waste disposal that is exacerbated by the tourism industry in Maldives.

3. Effects of the environmental problems on life in Maldives- shortage of drinking water

Links:

- <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2012/01/03/sea-levels-rise-in-the-maldives-and-drinking-water-diminishes/>
- <http://www.takepart.com/article/2012/01/02/waterwomen-3-clean-drinking-water-all>

Description: These articles describe how the environmental crisis has led to a shortage of drinking water for the people of Maldives.

4. Earth Day Coalition : About Environmental Justice

Link: <http://www.earthdaycoalition.org/content/environmental-justice>

Description: This is the official website for Earth Day Coalition (EDC), which is a nonprofit environmental education and advocacy organization serving Northeast Ohio and the nation. The above link provides a definition for environmental justice, the history of the environmental justice movement, example of environmental injustice to Ohio and more information related to environmental justice.

5. Global Warming Could create 150 million environmental refugees by 2050

Link: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/nov/03/global-warming-climate-refugees>

Description: This article talks about the implications of global warming leading to displacement of millions of people from countries around the world – environmental refugees.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

1. Introduction to Modern Climate Change- By Professor Andrew Dessler

Resource type: Book

Description: This textbook is tightly focused on the problem of anthropogenic climate change. It is unique among textbooks on climate change in that it combines an introduction of the science with an introduction to the non-science issues such as the economic and policy options.

2. Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements and Nature – By David Schlosberg

Resource type: Book

Description: The basic task of this book is to explore what, exactly, is meant by 'justice' in definitions of environmental and ecological justice. It examines how the term is used in both self-described environmental justice movements and in theories of environmental and ecological justice.

3. Haiti: Where did all the money go?

Resource type: Documentary

Description: This controversial documentary questions whether funds gathered by the American Red Cross were utilized for rehabilitation of people in Haiti. This documentary puts forth an example of environmental justice in the United States.