In these fascinating articles, your students will first learn about the Killer Smog of 1952, which blanketed London for days and left thousands dead. The second article explores the air pollution crisis in Beijing today.

**Learning Objective:** to synthesize information from two texts about air pollution

**Key Skills:** author’s craft, key ideas and details, inference, central ideas and details, reading for information, context clues, comprehension, synthesis

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**Step-by-Step Lesson Plan**

**Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building**

**1 Preparing to Read**

**Watch a video**

(10 minutes, activity online)

- Project or distribute the Video Discussion Questions. Preview the questions as a class.
- Watch the Behind the Scenes video, in which the author talks to your students about descriptive writing in “Killer Smog.”
- Have students work in small groups to answer the video discussion questions.

**Preview vocabulary**

(5 minutes, activity online)

- Project or distribute our Vocabulary Words and Definitions for students to refer to as they read. Highlighted words in “Killer Smog”: imposed, respiratory, shrouded, slathered, smothering.
- Highlighted words in “Smog So Thick, Beijing Comes to a Standstill”: bunkered, dystopian, industrialization, prompted, rein in.
- Assign the activity as homework.

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**2 Reading and Discussing**

“Killer Smog”

(35 minutes, activity sheet online)

- Read “Killer Smog” as a class and discuss the following questions.

**Close-Reading Questions**

Reread the first two paragraphs. Why might Lauren Tarshis waits until paragraph two to reveal that “this terrifying killer was air”? (author’s craft) Tarshis likely waits to reveal the “killer was air” to create suspense and hook the reader’s attention. She also sets the reader up for a surprise: Most people do not think of air as dangerous. This surprise draws the reader more deeply into the narrative—he or she will want to know how air can kill.

Why did the British government do little to reduce air pollution in London before the Killer Smog of 1952? (key ideas and details, inference) There are several reasons the government likely did little about the smog problem: Most people didn’t fully understand...
the serious health consequences of air pollution. There were also economic reasons. According to the article, most Londoners could only afford to heat their homes with coal and factory owners worried that reducing pollution would be too costly.

Identify a central idea of the section “New Laws for Cleaner Air.” List two details from the section that support that idea. (central ideas and details) A central idea of the section is that after the Killer Smog of 1952, measures were put in place to reduce air pollution. Details that support this idea: The British and American governments passed laws to make air cleaner, pollution-producing factories were moved outside London, the British government began helping residents pay for cleaner heating systems.

“Smog So Thick, Beijing Comes to a Standstill” (15 minutes, activity sheet online)

• Read the article as a class. Note that it may be a stretch text for many students. The following scaffolded questions will help with comprehension, as will having first read “Killer Smog,” which introduces key concepts about air pollution.
• Discuss the following questions, some of which refer to both texts.

Close-Reading Questions

What steps were taken in Beijing to deal with the air pollution crisis last December? (reading for information) According to the article, the government closed schools, told people not to drive, and shut down factories. The government also declared a red alert and sounded alarms in the subways to warn people about the health dangers of the smog.

What was the purpose of those steps? Think about what you learned from “Killer Smog” about the causes of air pollution. (inference, synthesis) Schools may have been closed so that kids didn’t have to go outside and breathe the toxic air. Bans on driving may have been put in place because gas is a major contributor to smog. Factories may have been shut down because they burn fuel. The warnings were likely issued to make people take the problem seriously.

Edward Wong describes China’s trade of a healthy living environment for fast economic growth as a “devil’s handshake.” Context clues reveal that a devil’s handshake is what? (context clues) A devil’s handshake is a deal in which someone gets something they want by giving up something very—or perhaps more—valuable.

Reread the last section. What reason does Wong suggest for China’s not having issued a red alert for air pollution before December 2015? What similar situation is described in “Killer Smog”? (comprehension, synthesis) Wong suggests that the Chinese government resisted issuing a red alert in the past because it believed that doing so might hurt the economy. This is a similar situation to the British government’s doing little to combat smog prior to 1952.

Critical-Thinking Question

What are some obstacles to reducing air pollution? How can they be overcome? Obstacles include: the expense; a lack of awareness about the causes and the dangers; government resistance to regulating pollution; individuals feeling unable to change their lifestyles. Ways to overcome the obstacles include: governments creating laws to limit pollution; increasing awareness about the causes and dangers; taking small steps like turning off lights, reducing driving, and planting trees; re-evaluating our priorities. (Answers will vary.)

3 Skill Focus: Synthesis (20 minutes, activity online)

Distribute the Synthesis activity sheet. It will prepare students to respond to the writing prompt on page 29.
Differentiation

For Struggling Readers

In a well-organized paragraph, explain what positive changes came from the killer smog of 1952.

For Advanced Readers

Have students create a pamphlet, poster, or video about the dangers of air pollution. Students should explain what smog is, why it’s dangerous, and how we can help reduce it. (Tip: Consider having students focus their research on the air quality in your area.)

Go to Scope Online to see the complexity factors for these texts, including the Lexile score, as well as the video and support materials.