

VENICE: SINKING CITY

TEACHER'S NOTES

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Introduction

This premium reading lesson plan is inspired by the troubles currently facing Venice. It is an example of over-tourism and flooding. While each issue is created as a result of different effects, i.e. excess of tourism industry and climate change. This plan is designed to encourage open and free thinking about topics which are changing our world.

Allowing students to use critical thinking skills and draw upon existing knowledge will build up their confidence to debate and discuss ideas.

Student level: B1 / B2

Key skills:

- Reading
- Grammar: verb choice
- Listening comprehension
- Discussion
- Debates
- Sentence jumble

SINKING CITY

Venice's survival is being threatened by rising tides and tourism



DID YOU KNOW?

**THE LOCAL
POPULATION OF
VENICE WAS 60,000 IN
2015**

**38 MILLION
TOURISTS ARE
PROJECTED TO VISIT
VENICE IN 2025**

A troubled gem

Located in north-eastern Italy, Venice is widely known for its lagoon, splendid architecture, and being home to a number of artistic movements. The once city-state reached its financial and cultural height in the 14th century when its fortune was made trading silk, spices, and grain across the known world.

Present day Venice, also known as “The Queen of the Adriatic”, is undergoing a slow-motion collapse, in physical and cultural terms. The city is known to be sinking into the lagoon at a rate of 1 to 2 millimetres each year, and many of the original residents have left. The city once had a population of 164,000 in 1931 but it is now closer to 60,000 in 2015. Given that 55,000 tourists visit the city each day, it is safe to assume that locals are outnumbered on a daily basis.

Venice's ground subsidence was recognised decades ago when scientists realised that pumping groundwater from under the city, and the weight of the buildings, had caused its sinking. While water is no longer pumped up for residents and tourists, surveys from 2000 to 2010 published in *Geophysics* journal has indicated the city is continuing to sink and may have even started to tilt eastwards.



Rising tide

With the city's future already uncertain, another unstoppable force is heading its way. Each year the Adriatic sea which feeds the lagoon surrounding Venice has been rising at a rate of 2mm each year. When subsidence and water levels are combined the once "floating city" is in fact sinking at roughly 4mm each year.

The rising tides also creates growing problems with the city's canals, which flood four to five times each year, earning the name *Acqua Alta*, or "high water". During these times, residents need to place long planks of wood on pavements to stay above the floodwaters.

If these trends continue, without any intervention from meaningful engineering projects, the city could sink as much as 80mm within the next two decades.

In an effort save the city, the Italian government has invested in a multibillion-euro project to install flood-protection walls to block rising tides. Named the MOSE Project (Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico) which consists of massive hollow metal blocks which can be raised and lowered according to the tide levels.

When in use, four defence barriers work together to raise air filled metal blocks that are anchored at one end to the sea floor. The barrier can be fully operational within 30 minutes.

According to *La Stampa*, a popular newspaper, the flood barrier, which was 85% complete in 2013, is already suffering from erosion caused by mold, and surprisingly, mussels. Some metal box sections that are waiting to be installed have been sitting on land for so long, that the sea air has started to rust. Around 66 to 69 per cent of 156 hinges, which connect the metal box section to sunken concrete structures, are already said to be unusable.

There has also been serious episodes of corruption and bribery to cover up work and plans that were bad in design and execution. To fix these design errors, an additional €700 million will be required. This is on top of the estimated €110 million maintenance cost and the initial €5.5 billion to create the project.

Tourism is leading to population decline

The cost of living in an incredibly touristic city is high. The average home value is skyrocketing thanks to international interest, the local job market is filled with low income hospitality jobs, and the population is ageing rapidly. Together, it is a recipe for a declining community.

Venice suffers the most from its geography. With the island not having many cars, or roads for that matter, the main form of transportation is by boat. Clearing out rubbish, bringing in goods, moving from place to place, and going to the local supermarket all require the use of boats or to go on foot. Though an eco-friendly choice, it does mean transportation costs are much higher than for a regular city.

Utilities like water, electricity, rubbish disposal, and sewage treatment for the city are kept off the islands. The surrounding towns of Mestre, Treviso, and Padova host all of the services for Venice. Life in these towns is 75 per cent cheaper than central Venice so it is common for tourists to book hotel accommodation in these towns to later travel into the city by bus.

Many residents of Venice are either the very rich, who are hoping to indulge in the romanticised life of the City of Canals, or elderly inheritors of property. So many young people have fled the city that according to the local government, around 25% of the population is aged 65 or over.

The city is a living outdoor museum, where history and daily life mix freely together. With such historic sites experiencing heavy wear and tear, constant maintenance, repairs, cleaning canals of debris, and lifting sunken foundations is needed. Such work is expensive. Business rents and local home taxes are higher than average to recoup these costs, further alienating young residents.

To accommodate the ever growing number of visitors, planning laws were relaxed in 1999 to expedite new hotel construction. Since then, the city has seen a 600% increase in the number of hotels on the main island. Many have taken notice. In 2017, the local Mayor's office attempted to 'crack down' on new urban planning applications for guest houses in an effort to curb overbuilding.

As the eastern economies of India and China continue to flourish, the demand to see the city only grows stronger. If one took a stroll at any time of the day, it would be impossible to go without seeing a group of tourists being shuttled around for more than 20 seconds. For locals, it makes their home a more unfamiliar place. Preserving local customs and culture is ultimately a concern, as with each passing year, it becomes ever more diluted.



Discussion questions

- When was the last time you went on holiday? Did you feel that there were too many people where you went?
- If a holiday spot becomes very popular, what are the negative consequences for the locals?
- Some areas in the world now ask for a 'tourism tax' which is paid by tourists at hotels. The idea is to use the tax money to invest in infrastructure and to help those areas. How do you feel about this tax?
- Why have some places in the world become so incredibly popular that they now have too many tourists? What could create this situation?
- If you were the mayor of Venice, what policies would you introduce to ensure the local people are looked after and the local culture is preserved?



Debating motions

There is a difference between a traveller and a tourist.

This house believes that some areas in the world should have a tourism tax.

Tourism is quickly making cities into a giant theme parks and unliveable for locals.

Listening task

Your instructor will read the article Rising Tide, listen carefully and fill in the missing spaces.

Rising Tide

With the city's future already uncertain another [1]_____ force is heading its way. Each year the Adriatic sea which feeds the lagoon surrounding Venice has been [2]_____ at a rate of 2mm each year. When subsidence and water levels are combined the once "floating city" is in fact sinking at roughly 4mm each year.

The rising tides also creates growing problems with the city's [3]_____, which flood four to five times each year, earning the name Acqua alta, or "high water". During these times, residents need to place long planks of wood on [4]_____ to stay above the floodwaters.

If these trends continue, without any intervention from [5]_____ engineering projects, the city could sink as much as 80mm within the next two decades.

In an effort save the city, the Italian government [6]_____ invested in a multibillion-euro project to install flood-protection walls to block rising tides. Named the MOSE Project (Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico) which consists of [7]_____ hollow metal blocks which can be raised and lowered according to the tide levels.

When in use, four defence barriers work together to [8]_____ air filled metal blocks that are anchored at one end to the sea floor. The barrier [9]_____ be fully operational within 30 minutes.



According to La Stampa, a popular newspaper, the flood barrier, which was 85% [10]_____ in 2013, is already suffering from erosion caused by mold, and surprisingly, mussels. Some [11]_____ box sections that are waiting to be installed have been sitting on land for so long, that the sea air has [12]_____ to rust. Around 66 to 69 per cent of 156 hinges, which connect the metal box section to sunken [13]_____ structures, are already said/say/saying to be unusable..

There has also been serious episodes of [14]_____ and bribery to cover up work and plans that were bad in design and execution. To fix these design errors, an additional € [15]_____ million will be required. This is on top of the estimated €110 million maintenance cost and the initial €5.5 billion to create the project.

Grammar task

Choose the best word that fits the sentence grammatically.

Rising tide

With the city's future already uncertain another unstoppable force **is/are** heading its way. Each year the Adriatic sea which feeds the lagoon surrounding Venice has been **risen/rising** at a rate of 2mm each year. When subsidence and water levels are **combined/combining** the once "floating city" is in fact sinking at roughly 4mm each year.

The rising tides also creates growing problems with the city's canals, which flood four to five times each year, has **earned/earning** the name Acqua alta, or "high water". During these times, residents need to place long planks of wood on pavements to **stay/staying** above the floodwaters.

If these trends continue, without any intervention from **mean/meaningful** engineering projects, the city could sink as much as 80mm within the next two decades.

In an effort **save/saving** the city, the Italian government has invested in a multibillion-euro project to **installing/install** flood-protection walls to block rising tides. Named the MOSE Project (Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico) which **consists/consisted** of massive hollow metal blocks which can be raised and **lowered/lowering** according to the tide levels.

When in use, four defence barriers work together to raise air **filled/been filled** metal blocks that are anchored at one end to the sea floor. The barrier can be fully operational within 30 minutes.



According to La Stampa, a popular newspaper, the flood barrier, which was 85% complete in 2013, is already suffering from **erosion/eroded** caused by mold, and surprisingly, mussels. Some metal box sections that **be/are** waiting to be installed have been sitting on land for so long, that the sea air **had/has** started to rust them. Around 66 to 69 per cent of 156 hinges, which connect the metal box section to sunken concrete structures, are already **say/said/saying** to be unusable.

There has also been serious episodes of corruption and bribery to cover **along/up** work and plans that were bad in design and execution. To fix these design errors, an additional 700 million will be required. This is **on/at** top of the estimated 110 million maintenance cost and the initial 5.5 billion to create the project.

Line jumble task

Cut each line into strips and ask students to reorder the jumbled text.

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To accommodate the ever growing number of visitors, planning laws were relaxed in 1999 to expedite new hotel construction. Since then, the city has seen a 600% increase in the number of hotels on the main island. Many have taken notice. In 2017, the local Mayor's office attempted to 'crack down' on new urban planning applications for guest houses in an effort to curb overbuilding.

As the eastern economies of India and China continue to flourish, the demand to see the city only grows stronger. If one took a stroll at any time of the day, it would be impossible to go without seeing a group of tourists being shuttled around for more than 20 seconds. For locals, it makes their home a more unfamiliar place. Preserving local customs and culture is ultimately a concern, as with each passing year, it becomes ever more diluted.