

# THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

## Modern Marvels

### The Alaskan Oil Pipeline

Extending over 800 miles in some of the harshest terrain and climate on the earth, the Alaskan Oil Pipeline is a modern engineering miracle. Built in response to the oil shortages of the 1970s, the pipeline enabled oil companies to tap a huge reserve of oil trapped under the frozen tundra. But many opposed the pipeline, including environmental groups who saw the pipeline as a threat to the delicate ecological balance in the pristine Prince William Sound. *The Alaskan Oil Pipeline* would be useful for classes on American History, Environmental History, American Culture, Political Science, Geography and Science and Technology. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

- [buzzword](#)
- [dissipate](#)
- [endeavor](#)
- [exorbitant](#)
- [impenetrable](#)
- [injunctions](#)
- [limbo](#)
- [mammoth](#)
- [ominous](#)
- [profound](#)
- [ravenous](#)
- [terminus](#)
- [tundra](#)
- [undermine](#)
- [vigor](#)
- [viscous](#)

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is the story of the Alaskan Oil Pipeline the story of the struggle between human beings and nature?
2. Many environmental groups expressed concern over the pipeline. What were some of the concerns of the environmentalists? Why is it necessary to monitor projects such as the Alaskan Oil Pipeline?
3. The Alaskan Oil Pipeline was one of the most difficult projects ever constructed. Discuss some of the challenges and obstacles faced by the builders of the pipeline.
4. What prompted American oil companies to embark on such a difficult and expensive project?
5. What is a wildcatter?
6. How did the advent of the OPEC oil embargo overshadow some of the environmental concerns regarding the pipeline?
7. Why is the discovery of oil a mixed blessing for the region in which it is discovered?
8. What is permafrost? How did permafrost affect the design and construction of the pipeline?
9. The Alaskan Oil Pipeline does not run in a straight line; it zigzags. Why does it zigzag?

10. In 1989, one of the worst oil spills in history occurred when the Exxon Valdez spilled its contents into Prince William Sound. How did this environmental disaster change and improve safety precautions?

### **Extended Activities**

1. On a map of Alaska, trace the path of the Alaskan Oil Pipeline.
2. Create a poster celebrating Earth Day.