



The BIG Irish Fossil Fuel Sponsorship DEBATE!

Schools Resource

‘We seem trapped in a world where fossil fuel producers and financiers have humanity by the throat. For decades, the fossil fuel industry has invested heavily in pseudoscience and public relations – with a false narrative to minimise their responsibility for climate change and undermine ambitious climate policies. They exploited precisely the same scandalous tactics as big tobacco decades before.



Like tobacco interests, fossil fuel interests and their financial accomplices must not escape responsibility.’

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations - November 2022

We have all become increasingly aware of the urgent and potentially devastating impact of climate change and ongoing environmental destruction. Much of the debate on what needs to be done without delay focuses on fossil fuels, the damage they do and, on the power and impact of fossil fuel companies.

Following the recent World Cup in Qatar, we have also become aware of how companies and countries use sport, the arts and education to attempt to polish up their image against evidence of environmental and human rights abuses.

In this context, both countries and companies sponsor sports and cultural events, museums, football teams and tournaments and make extensive use of ‘celebrities’ to promote their agendas and interests.

Ireland is not immune to this process. Since 1955, Texaco has sponsored a popular and successful art competition in Irish schools. The competition has involved schools and students at all levels across the country and is now in its 69th year.

Given the very changed circumstances since

1955, we believe that the time has come to call a halt to the competition. We believe it is wrong to give Texaco a schools-based platform to promote a damaging agenda. What started out in 1955 as a simple art competition has become a conscious ‘greenwashing’ activity in climate emergency times.

Texaco has now also introduced a sports focused grants scheme which seeks to use many of Ireland’s iconic sports brands to pursue a similar greenwash agenda.

It is time to ask serious questions about the behaviour of Texaco and its enablers and promoters and about the culture of silence that surrounds the issue. How can our schools promote blue flags, sustainability and environmental education while also participating in a fossil fuel company competition? How can sports clubs promote the health and well-being of their members while ignoring the health and well-being of the planet on which they live?

We also believe that it is important that schools – Boards of Management, teachers, students, and parents – think seriously about the issue. We have produced this brief resource to stimulate this agenda.

Some suggested activities

The Big Debate

Texaco has asked your school to participate in its Art Competition. Opinions are divided as to whether the school and its students should. Organise a debate to explore the issues from the following perspectives:

- a representative of Texaco
- the school Principal
- a group of art students who support the idea
- a group of students who oppose it
- the environmentalist who insists taking part is bad for the school and its students
- an indigenous leader from a country such as Ecuador

Additional debate topics

- Should Fossil Fuel Companies be allowed sponsor school events or competitions?
- Should 'An Taisce Green Schools' take part in an art competition funded by a fossil fuel company
- Should 'celebrities' use their popularity to promote fossil fuel company agendas?

Write a newspaper editorial on the issue

- Check out your local or national newspaper and see how editorials are written and what kind of topics and approaches are employed
- Use these models to write your own editorial on the issues involved with a fossil fuel company sponsoring events or competitions in schools or about the involvement of 'celebrities'
- Send on your editorial to your local or national newspaper and invite them to publish it

Make a video presentation or slide show on the debate

- Make a short video commentary on the issues involved in this debate
- It could include brief inputs by different commentators on the various different viewpoints – for and against, not sure, not interested etc
- Different actors could play different roles in the video.
- Upload the result for others to view
- Make a 6 o'clock news style report (presenter plus 'on the spot' reporter) on the debate
- Make a slide show around these issues

The 'Not the Fossil Fuels' Art Competition

- Invite students to make an art piece or a poster exploring the issues involved with fossil fuels in the context of climate change – pieces/posters could be simply exploratory; they could pose questions, take sides, or focus on specific issues (Fossil fuel companies, environmental activism, statements by UN, international and national politicians etc.)
- Think about focusing on the broader issue of sports and arts 'greenwashing' and create art pieces or posters on these
- Create a poster that specifically highlights the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples across the world and their viewpoints on the activities and impacts of fossil fuel companies
- Organise a school exhibition to display the results and publicise it.

For additional information, analysis and onward links, check out some of the following sites and resources.

On greenwashing:

What is greenwashing and how to spot it - from the BBC online in 2021

<https://bit.ly/3YyRES5>

A good place to start in exploring the topic – case studies, argument, and action ideas.

<https://earth.org/what-is-greenwashing/> - more argument, case studies, links (including links to international campaigns etc.)

<https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/what-is-greenwashing/> - Greenpeace on the issue, argument, case studies, video material and 5 areas for further action (transport, heating, food and waste, fashion and technology).

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/what-is-greenwashing-how-to-spot> - National Geographic's analysis and action suggestions.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2021/1031/1256664-how-to-tell-if-an-eco-friendly-firm-is-greenwashing/>
Irish business and greenwashing, an RTE analysis and also from the Independent
<https://www.independent.ie/life/explainer-what-is-greenwashing-and-how-can-we-avoid-it-38324843.html>

On fossil fuel companies:

Check out this myths discussion on art, greenwashing and Chevron by Kai Evans on www.developmenteeducation.ie Children's art & 'greenwashing': Is Chevron/Texaco overstating its carbon emissions claims? <http://bit.ly/3IGsUBU>

For a more detailed review of fossil fuel companies, greenwashing and associated issues, see the NGO Global Witness 2023 report analysing the Green Claims Code <http://bit.ly/3Ki6J6l> and their overall analysis of the issue <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/fossil-gas/>
See also the resources from Trocaire on fossil fuel myths and on the divestment campaign <https://www.trocaire.org/news/5-fossil-fuel-myths-busted>

Video resources:

Muddying the Waters in Ecuador - <https://vimeo.com/399290099> (Password: KMF_ECU)

The Curse of Oil Angola - <https://vimeo.com/372451480> (Password: WitW_ANG)

Keeping your head above water in Tuvalu - <https://vimeo.com/365052654> (Password: WitW_TUV)

Requiem for Snow (Greenland) - <https://vimeo.com/406343698> (Password: KMF_GRN)

On going further:

Having discussed and debated the issues explored in the campaign, you might consider sending the following message (or something similar) to Texaco.

In recognition of Texaco / Chevron's attempted arts and sportswashing of its reputation, its excessive profiteering (\$36.5 billion for the year ending 2022) along with its wholly destructive carbon footprint across the world, I/we (insert individual name / organisation here and address) are boycotting all Texaco-related arts and sports competitions in Ireland

Please include [Your Name and Date]

Send to: The Texaco/Chevron email address is: customercare@valero.com

If you do this, **please let us know** at this email address: tomroche@justforests.org

This brief resource has been produced to support our broader campaign as outlined in this resource:

SpoArts WASH- exposing Ireland's fossil fuel sponsorship culture.

For more information on this campaign and to download the publication please visit: <https://spoarts.ie>



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