**Teachable moments: when an event happens, how do we make the most of the teachable moment without resorting to show and tell?**

spill event | discovery of contaminated gw/soil | water supply issue/drought

event w/ potential env. impact (tsunami, eq, eruption, flood, weather event)

new legislation/law suit/ruling | new remediation effort

* Integrate “What’s happening in the news” each week
  + Can be assigned or informal; can ask for web submission before class; individual students can be assigned to be in charged of sleuthing each week, plus a brief presentation.
  + Make this an important part of class to accustom students to looking for news about and thinking about events that are geo-related.
  + If the instructor brings things in on a regular basis starting at the beginning of the semester, it encourages students to bring things in.
  + If you have a Facebook page for your course, you can put links about the event on the course Facebook page. Have students bring questions to class about the event.
* Have an activity ready to go on something that you know is likely to happen during the semester (e.g., a Nor’easter, an earthquake)
  + Saves you from having to scramble to develop something when an event happens (makes you less likely to just talk to them about it!!).
  + Build the kinds of questions into the assignment that you would want them to ask when they encounter the same event in the future.
* Involve students in finding out about and evaluating the event – partly to capture their interest, partly to help them learn more, and partly to shape their habits in the future.
  + Have students do searches either before or during class on the event, or the instructor can bring in an article/web site or have students read ahead of time.
  + Ask students to react to the event, make observations if possible.
  + Bring up images they’ve found, discuss them.
  + Have students evaluate what’s been written in what they found, reliability, accuracy of the picture conveyed, omissions; have students analyze the science behind event in the context of the course topic.
  + Rate the article on how much is technical content/science and how much is opinion/viewpoint. This is an opportunity to have students address the facts that 1) different constituencies have different viewpoints and that consensus/compromise is important if a decision needs to be made and 2) that science is not the only factor involved in decisions surrounding events. Comparing reporting in various venues (articles, web sites, TV news) is very useful.
  + Have students analyze information in the article/web site by finding and evaluating additional (reliable) information on the topic. This prepares them for doing this on their own in the future.
  + Have student predict the impact of the event with respect to the course topic.
  + Emphasize the transferability of the skill of learning about an event and evaluating the information presented/available about an event. Have students be reflective about how they will respond to a future event.
  + Have students write a letter to the article author – alternative interpretations, clarifications, reactions (Holly did this with a class of 100 and actually mailed the letters to the governor).
* Make use of real-time or near real-time data of events (e.g., seismographs, stream gauge data)
  + For example, an inexpensive large-screen monitor can be running continually in the classroom and portraying real-time seismograph data.