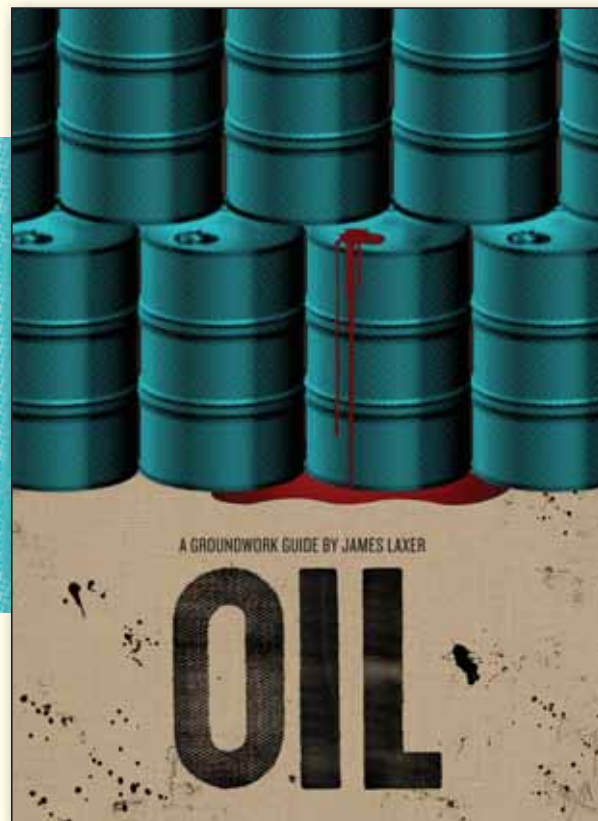


# OIL

## A GROUNDWORK GUIDE

Written by James Laxer



### ABOUT THE BOOK

This book explores today's global dependency on oil and reveals the sobering realities of the relationship between oil, politics and money. The book examines the following topics:

- the history of petroleum and the petroleum industry
- the economics and politics of oil in the Middle East, Russia and the Caspian Sea region, and the Western hemisphere
- peak oil, climate change and alternative energy sources
- the unique challenges of averting the crisis

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

- Social Studies (Civics, Geography, History, World Studies)
- Business Studies (Economics)
- Science and Technology
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- English Language Arts
- Arts (Visual Arts, Theater Arts)
- Information and Communications Technology

### IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

- Introduce the book and your goals for studying it, and briefly outline the issues the book explores. Tell students that issues-based study raises varied opinions, and that, as a class, you will set some ground rules for maintaining a respectful and safe classroom atmosphere for discussing personal views. Ask the class to collaborate to create a list of expectations, such as “We’ll respect one another’s privacy”; “We’ll listen to one another”; and “We won’t insult one another.” Post the list and revisit it periodically to allow students to make observations and air problems.
- As a way of accessing (and assessing) students’ knowledge about the oil industry, display *Getting Started: Tangled Webs* (included in this guide) and have students create a similar one in their notebooks. Have them work on their own or in small groups to write about links they are aware of between the topics. After their study of the book, they can return to the web and expand on it, based on what they have learned.

### TEACHING/LEARNING APPROACHES

- Read the book as a class, with group or class discussions at the end of each chapter and a culminating activity at the end. You could use a combination of teacher read-aloud, guided reading and independent reading.
- Have students read the book independently and create their own independent study project.
- Assign groups of students one chapter each and have them read it and present it to the rest of the class.
- Have students read the book in groups and then either collaborate on a culminating activity or complete it independently.
- Ask students to keep an Issues Journal (in writing or on audio or video) in which they comment on what they have read and/or discussed. Encourage frequent updates throughout the study of *Oil*. Let students know from the outset whether the journal is for personal use only, or if it’s meant to be part of their assessment.

### IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION

- How do you feel after reading this book? What did you learn? What surprised you? What did you already know? What do you agree with? What do you disagree with? What would you like to learn more about?
- Early in the book (p. 21), the author writes, “It is no exaggeration to assert that we have entered the crisis of the petroleum age.” How does he go on to support that assertion? Do you agree?

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- Why do oil prices fluctuate? What happened in the 1970s crisis?
- What are some of the varying opinions of when peak oil will be reached? Why is this such an important forecast? (pp. 27–28)
- What is OPEC and why was it formed? How effective has it been?
- What do you think of John D. Rockefeller’s outlook on “sacrificing the early buds” — meaning his competitors? Do you believe that there is a natural struggle for survival and dominance within a society? (p. 32)
- In 1951, when Iran acted to nationalize its petroleum industry, how did the US and Britain respond?
- Does it surprise you that foreign firms have been allowed to participate in countries’ petroleum industries? Why have they been able to do so?
- What was the George W. Bush administration’s strategy in the Persian Gulf area, and what had happened to the strategy by November 2006? (p. 64)
- On page 106, there is a quote from the National Security Strategy of the United States describing Hugo Chávez. Based on the information in Chapter 5, how might you rewrite that quote?
- In the last chapter, the author summarizes why the people who hold the power in oil are unlikely to change their course. What are the reasons he cites?

## IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES

- Introduce a “last barrel” scenario, after the last barrel of oil in the world has been produced. As a class, discuss possible issues to include in the scenario, such as effects on the economy; human responses (e.g., tension, co-operation, enmity); steps the government is taking; effect on food supplies; effects on daily life; effects on travel and transportation; effects on communities, provinces/states and countries; effects on international relations. Students can decide on the parameters of the scenario — how long after the last barrel the scenario takes place and whether it’s a local, national or global scenario. To explore the issues in the scenario, students could do one of the following activities:
    - write and enact a script about a family’s typical day living the scenario
    - role-play individuals who post blogs or keep a journal or video diary about the scenario
    - write a series of monologues representing people around the world living the scenario
    - role-play an international meeting of heads of state in which they discuss the issues
- Subjects:** World Studies, English Language Arts, Civics, Geography, Humanities and Social Sciences, Economics, Arts (Theater Arts)
- Students work as a class to create a survey based on information from the book and their own research, an “Energy Literacy Quiz,” to conduct in your school (or beyond) to gauge the

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## OIL

level of public awareness and concern about oil and energy issues. Here are some sample questions:

- Which energy source does your country use most? (a) coal, (b) natural gas, (c) oil, (d) nuclear power.
- China is the top oil-consuming country. True or False?
- How concerned are you about global oil resources? (a) extremely, (b) considerably, (c) somewhat, (d) not at all.

Ensure that students have the answers available so they can review them with the people they survey. Students should test their quiz on some people and make necessary revisions before taking it to the public. After conducting the quiz, students can share and compile the data and publish the results.

**Subjects:** World Studies, English Language Arts, Civics, Geography, Humanities and Social Sciences, Economics

- Students create an artwork, such as a photo exhibit, video, painting, song or mixed media work, symbolizing an issue they read about in *Oil* that really resonated with them. They should include a written explanation of the theme and their thinking behind the work.

**Subjects:** Visual Arts, World Studies, English Language Arts

- Students research other energy sources, such as solar, geothermal, wind and tide. They could choose one to research on its own, or two or more of them. They could present their findings in a written or oral report with supporting diagrams, as a model, using animation software, in an information brochure or in a poster.

**Subjects:** Science and Technology, Geography, World Studies, English Language Arts, Information and Communications Technology

- Students create a diagram, slideshow, animation or model showing one of the following: the formation of oil, the composition and properties of oil, oil drilling (land or sea), transporting oil from source to final destination, oil refining.

**Subjects:** Science and Technology, Geography, World Studies, English Language Arts, Information and Communications Technology

- Students create a world map showing the world's major oil deposits. They can annotate the map with information they have learned from *Oil* or from other research. For example, they could note the number of oil reserves in the areas, or identify the main consumers of a particular country's oil, or identify the major controllers of the oil resources.

**Subjects:** Geography, World Studies, Economics, English Language Arts

- Students find a selection of editorial cartoons (past and present) that correspond to some of the main issues raised in *Oil*. They present them in a photo essay, with captions explaining how they relate to the book. They might also create one of their own.

**Subjects:** English Language Arts, Visual Arts, World Studies, Economics, Humanities and Social Sciences

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- Point out to students Sweden’s steps in preparing for a post-petroleum world (pp. 80–82). They could compare Sweden’s green initiatives with those of one or more other countries’. Their research could be presented in a comparative essay.

**Subjects:** Geography, World Studies, Economics, Science and Technology, English Language Arts

- Students choose an oil-producing country or area described in *Oil*, such as the Middle East, Canada, Venezuela, Russia or the Caspian region, and do further research to create a detailed profile of its oil industry — its history, its reserves, the geopolitics involved, who controls it (in the past and currently), who it supplies, trade agreements and so on.

**Subjects:** Geography, History, World Studies, Economics, Science and Technology, English Language Arts

- Big oil, seven sisters, the supermajors, the oil giants, the “new seven sisters” — talk with students about major companies of the oil industry, past and present. Students then develop a research question based on aspects of these companies that most interest them. They could compare earnings over time; trace the history of one of the companies; research their resource holdings; research their development projects; learn about their ranking and their vulnerabilities; find out about what they control.

**Subjects:** Geography, History, World Studies, Economics, English Language Arts

- Students select a variety of daily newspapers from different months (or years) and scan them to look for possible links to oil issues. They should watch for stories that may be connected to oil even though the connection is not explicitly stated. They could discuss their findings in groups — what did they look for, and why?

**Subjects:** World Studies, English Language Arts, Civics, Economics

### CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER GROUNDWORK GUIDES

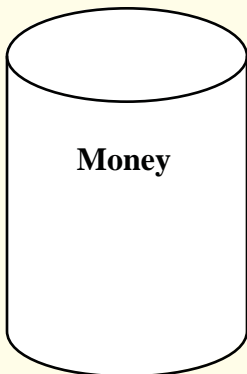
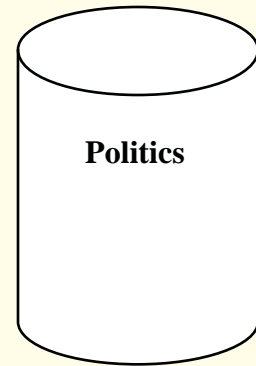
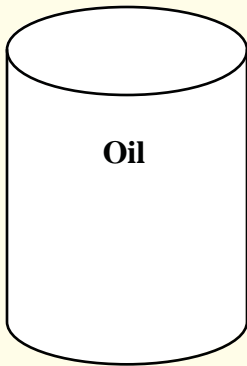
- See *The Betrayal of Africa, Democracy and Empire* for issues of colonialism, imperialism, global economics, American intervention and global politics.
- See *Cities* for issues of urbanization, population movement and energy resources.
- See *Climate Change* for issues of energy resources and greenhouse gas emissions.
- See *Democracy and Empire* for two other books by the same author.
- Have students select other books in the series for independent study.

# GROUNDWORK GUIDES

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### GETTING STARTED: TANGLED WEBS

- Make connections between the following topics to show how they interconnect. Draw lines with arrows between the circles and write your explanatory notes along the lines. For example, between Oil and Money, you might write, “Oil has made a lot of people a lot of money.” Between Oil and Politics, you might write, “Governments are striving to control the world’s oil resources.”
- After you have studied *Oil*, you can return to your web and reflect on the connections you made and add new connections you’ve learned about.



## STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Describe your achievement in the study of this book and related class activities.**

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**2. What did you learn from your study of this book?**

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**3. What would you say were your strengths and weaknesses during your study of this book? Consider areas such as co-operation in group work, participation, comprehension of ideas, research skills and creating a product or performance.**

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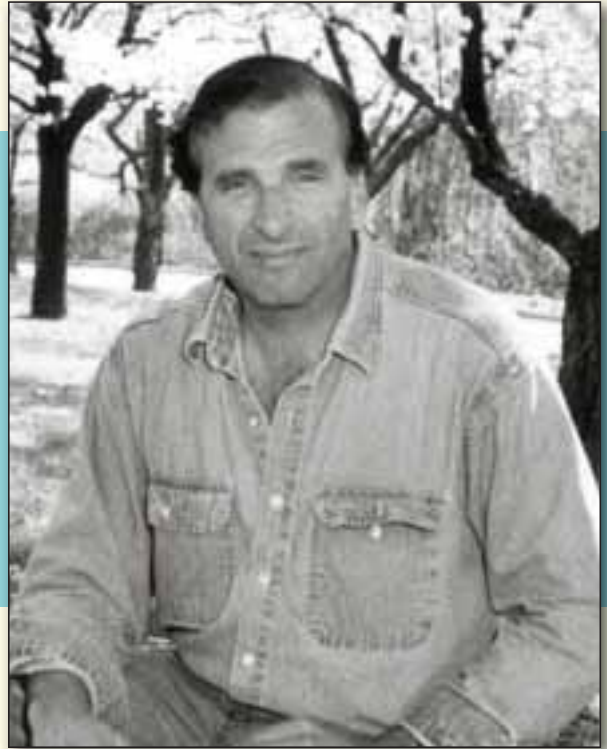
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## JAMES LAXER



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**JAMES LAXER**, an award-winning author, has written twenty-one books, including *Stalking the Elephant: My Discovery of America* (published by the New Press in New York as *Discovering America*), and *The Border: Canada, the U.S. and Dispatches from the 49th Parallel*. In his review of *Stalking the Elephant*, David Shribman, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the *Boston Globe*, said: “This is a book by a Canadian that can change the United States.”

James Laxer is a professor of political science at York University in Toronto, Ontario.



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“[The Groundwork Guides] are excellent books, mandatory for school libraries and the increasing body of young people prepared to take ownership of the situations and problems previous generations have left them.”

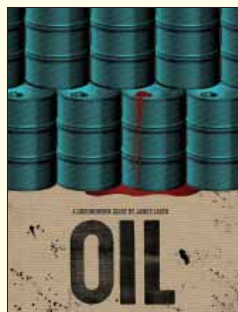
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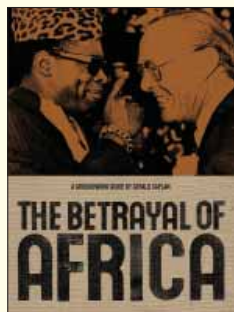
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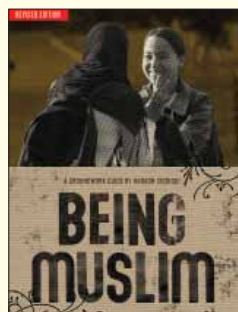
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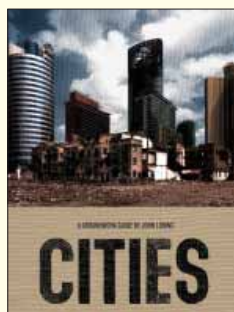
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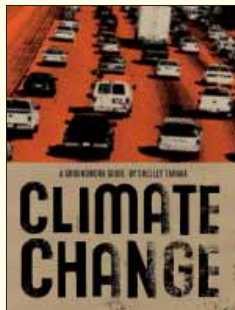


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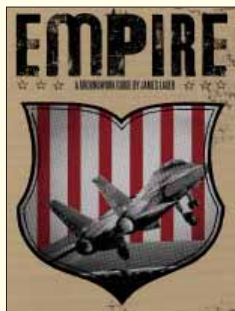
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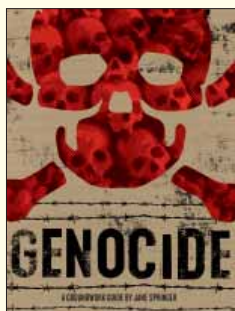
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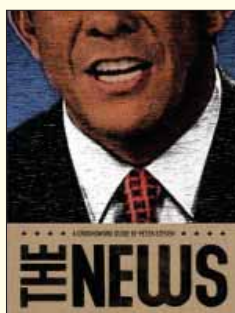
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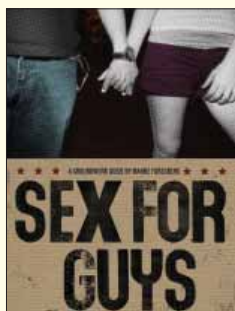
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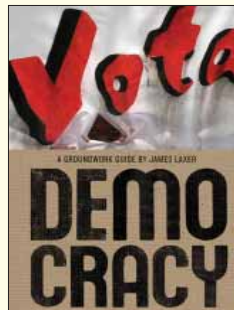
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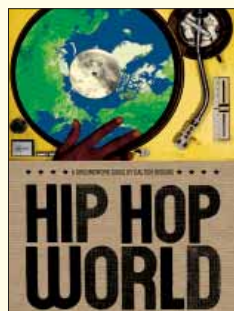
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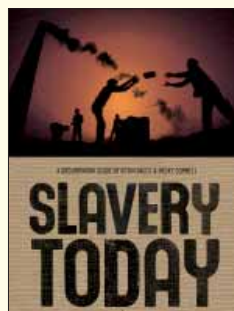
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