Articles and Questions

Each **free article** of ***What in the World?*** includes:   
  
1) a PDF file

*and*

2) a Word file

These files contain **only** the article and questions. They do **not** contain Answer Keys.

This **Word** file allows students to complete assignments using a computer either at school or at home. Teachers can assign all or parts of the file by email attachment or a school website. The **Word** file also allows teachers to:

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• create a PDF document and use Adobe Reader's 'Read Out Loud Mode'

• save paper and copying costs and help protect the environment

• promote and encourage students’ computer skills

What Else Can You Do With The Word File?

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<https://support.google.com/docs/answer/187189?hl=en&co=GENIE.Platform=Desktop>

**A Pacific Paradise is Sinking**

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Imagine you had to leave the only country you’ve ever known and loved because the ocean was swallowing your home. How would you feel? That’s the situation facing the inhabitants of Tuvalu, a nation of 11,000 people situated halfway between Australia and Hawaii.

This summer, more than 80 percent of Tuvalu’s population applied for special “climate visas” that would allow them to move to Australia. The reason? As soon as 2050, all of Tuvalu may be under water.

**The beauty of Tuvalu**

Tuvalu may be the first country to **succumb** to rising sea levels due to climate change and it probably won’t be the last. But its loss would be a heartbreak.

The island nation is a tiny jewel. At just 26 square kilometres—about one‑quarter the size of Disney World—it is made up of turquoise lagoons, swaying palm trees and coral **atolls** that glow in the tropical sun. Its crystal-clear waters, white sandy beaches, and vibrant marine life make it one of the most unspoiled and breathtaking places in the Pacific.

The country consists of nine islands and atolls. Tuvalu means “eight standing together” in Polynesian—the official language along with English. The name refers to the eight populated atollsand speaks to how connected the people feel to one another.

**The ocean’s scary rise**

Yet that connection may soon be lost as Tuvaluans scatter to safer places. On average, Tuvalu is now only two metres above sea level—just 4.5 metres at its highest point. A NASA study showed that in 2023, the sea level around Tuvalu had risen 15 centimetres more than the 30-year average. If this trend continues, most of Tuvalu’s land and infrastructure will be below its high‑tide level by 2050.

Tuvalu already struggles with saltwater contamination. Seawater seeps into the country’s drinking water wells. The ocean contaminates crops and trees.

Rising waters also make Tuvalu more vulnerable to the storm surges extreme weather can cause. So climate change is literally hitting home.

**A warming planet**

That’s not surprising. Earth’s average surface temperature in 2024 was the hottest on record, NASA scientists report. Compared to the mid-19th century, 2024 was warmer by about 1.47 degrees Celsius.

Why look so far back? That’s because since the 1800s, humans have been the main drivers of climate change, study after study has shown. The Industrial Revolution began at the end of the 19th century. That’s when humans began burning fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas on a large scale.

We’ve seen the results of climate change for years now. These include droughts, increased wildfires, melting polar ice, rising sea levels and larger, more frequent storms.

**The Falepili agreement**

So faced with rising sea levels, Tuvalu is in the unenviable position of planning the first migration of an entire country. In 2023, Tuvalu and Australia signed the Falepili Union treaty. It’s the first agreement of its kind.

“For the first time there is a country that has committed legally to recognize the future statehood and sovereignty of Tuvalu despite the **detrimental** impact of climate changed-induced sea level rise,” said Tuvaluan Prime Minister Feleti Teo.

As part of the agreement, 280 Tuvaluans per year can settle in Australia as permanent residents. They can travel freely in and out of the country, and will have the same health, education, housing, and employment rights that Australians enjoy. They can also return to Tuvalu if conditions improve.

The relocation program is being called a ‘climate visa.’ Australia’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Penny Wong, said the program lets Tuvaluans settle “with dignity as climate impacts worsen.”

The Falepili program, combined with other migration pathways to Australia and New Zealand, could see up to four percent of Tuvalu’s population migrate each year.

**Mixed reactions**

The first round of applications opened in June in the form of a lottery. It cost $25 Australian (about $22 Canadian) to enter the draw. Including family members, 8750 people vied for the 280 spots.

Not everyone supports the program.

“I’m sure, given the ‘choice’, most Tuvaluans would prefer their homeland to remain above sea level and to prosper where their ancestors did,” wrote Enele Sopoaga, Leader of the Opposition in Tuvalu. He pointed out that Australia’s fossil fuel exports contribute to the same climate change impacts that threaten Tuvalu.

But for some, the opportunity is economic. On a small island nation like Tuvalu, basic supplies need to be brought in by plane or boat. The cost of living is high.

Metia Lotoala runs a lodge in Tuvalu. “I have a business,” he said. “I can work here and feed my family and live a comfortable life. But… most people have no way to make money. Most work you can find pays $5 per hour.”

**A glimmer of hope**

All the same, Tuvaluans are not passively waiting for their homeland to disappear. The Tuvalu Coastal Adaptation Project (TCAP) is working on solutions. That includes building land that will be above sea level and act as a buffer.

There’s also hope that NASA is wrong. Paul Kench, a coastal geomorphologist at the National University of Singapore, has been studying Tuvalu. He says that the atoll islands are always transforming themselves. They gain landmass in some areas while other areas erode. His work, however, focuses only on landmass—not habitability.

**A nation online only?**

No one can be sure what the future holds for Tuvalu. There has even been an effort to preserve it digitally.

“Our land, our ocean, our culture are the most precious assets of our people —and to keep them safe from harm, no matter what happens in the physical world, we’ll move them to the cloud,” said Tuvalu’s minister for foreign affairs, Simon Kofe.

The Digital Nation is creating a virtual copy of the islands. It is also trying to preserve the nation’s heritage. Tuvaluans are submitting stories, photos, and even dances.

In 2023, Tuvalu’s government declared that the state would continue to exist despite the threat to its physical future.

So in one form or another, it seems Tuvalu is determined to survive.

**Fleeing climate change**

Tuvalu is not the only country where climate change has forced relocation. Other island nations are also vulnerable to flooding. One example is the Maldives **archipelago** in the Indian Ocean. Most of its 1200 islands are less than 1.2 metres above sea level.

And climate change has already impacted certain regions. In 2023, Cyclone Freddy—the longest-lasting tropical cyclone recorded—soaked southern Malawi, displacing 650,000 people. Other countries were affected by the severe storm as well.

In 2024, about 1200 members of the Indigenous Guna community relocated from an island off the coast of Panama to the mainland. The cause? Rising sea levels were slowly sinking the island. Also in 2024, 300 people from Newtok, Alaska, had to relocate because the village was on melting permafrost.

The Lower 48 U.S. States have also been affected. Around 2.5 million Americans in 1.4 million homes live in areas at risk of a severe coastal flooding. Mexico and the Caribbean are caught in the climate-change crossfire, as well, with the Gulf of Mexico rising three times faster than the global average. And in Canada, wildfires have forced tens of thousands from their homes. Bottom line? By 2070, over three billion people could be living outside of humanity’s ‘climate niche’—the specific range of temperatures in which human beings thrive.

**archipelago**: a group of islands clustered together in a body of water, like an ocean, sea, or lake

**atoll**: an island or reef that surrounds a lagoon. An atoll is shaped like a ring.

**detrimental**: harmful or causing damage

**succumb**: to give way in the face of an overwhelming force

**Comprehension Questions**

1. Where is Tuvalu located? What is the population of this country?

2. List at least three other important geographical and cultural facts about this small country.

3. What is the average height of the country above sea level?

4. What did a NASA study show happened in 2023? What is expected to occur by 2050?

5. What agreement did Tuvalu sign with Australia regarding its population? When did this happen?

6. List two important details of the agreement.

7. How many residents of Tuvalu applied for the “climate visa” recently?

8. Explain why Tuvalu may not disappear below the waves.

**Questions For Further Thought**

1. At the 2023 COP, an annual UN Convention on Climate Change, Simon Kofe, Tuvalu's minister for foreign affairs, grabbed the attention of the world and other COP attendees. Mr. Kofe delivered a 23-second video message to the conference, while standing knee-deep in the waters surrounding Tuvalu, to highlight the rising sea level threat to his country.

As you see it, what is the responsibility of large nations whose carbon emissions are negatively impacting the living conditions in smaller countries who contribute little to climate change? Explain.

2. Tuvalu's minister for foreign affairs, Simon Kofe, said: “***Our land, our ocean, our culture are the most precious assets of our people —and to keep them safe from harm, no matter what happens in the physical world, we’ll move them to the cloud.***"

How might this work? Give specific examples to explain your thinking.

3. Imagine you had to leave the only country or region you've ever known and loved because the conditions created by climate change were making it unsafe or impossible to stay.

How would you feel? What priorities would you set for yourself and your family? Give examples to support your ideas.

**Questions For Online Exploration**

*Note*: The links below are listed at **www.lesplan.com/en/links** for easy access.

1. Learn more about the uncertain future for the nation of Tuvalu:  
**https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=lN4VXwSTNw0** [7:02]

What questions do you have?

2. Discover how Tuvalu began its planning to relocate as a country:  
**https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=aKdU7PxyKkc** [7:00]

What do you wonder?

3. Learn about the Falepili Union Treaty struck between Tuvalu and Australia to allow Tuvaluans to migrate to Australia on a climate visa: **https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/tuvalu/australia-tuvalu-falepili-union-treaty**

What did you learn?

4. How do you capture and document a country? Explore these creative ideas to ensure that if Tuvalu loses its physical location, its citizens can continue to function as a nation:  
**https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=IWEdkWnVkJo** [7:46]  
**https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=InTVdhufUUw** [10:40]

What questions do you have? Explain.

5. Watch this documentary made by 24-year-old Tuvaluan Grace Malie in her role as a youth delegate to COP28 in Dubai in 2023. In it, Tuvaluans share their feelings about leaving their homeland:  
**https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=H-ar5drhjzU** [21:12]

What stood out to you in this documentary? Explain.

6. Explore how some Tuvaluans who are living in Australia, are trying to preserve their culture, traditions and language:  
**https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=tMRWhla1aLQ** [5:40]

**Putting It All Together**

**A. Write the letter that corresponds to the** best **answer on the line beside each question:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1. What is the population of Tuvalu?** a) 5000 b) 11,000  
 c) 57,000 d) 105,000  
 e) 450,000

**\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. An island or reef that surrounds a lagoon is called a(n):** a) shoal b) peninsula  
 c) lagoon d) bank  
 e) atoll

**\_\_\_\_\_\_ 3. A NASA study predicts that all of Tuvalu will be below the high-tide level by:** a) 2030 b) 2045  
 c) 2050 d) 2080  
 e) 2100

**B. Mark the statements T (True) or F (False). If a statement is** True**, write one important fact to support it on the line below. If a statement is** False**, write the words that make it true on the line below.**\_\_\_\_\_\_ 4. **True** or **False**? The total area of Tuvalu is 26 square kilometres.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 5. **True** or **False**? A group of islands clustered together is called an archipelago.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 6. **True** or **False**? Tuvalu means “Eight standing together” in Polynesian.

**C. Fill in the blanks to complete each sentence.**

7. Tuvalu is made up of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ islands and atolls.

8. Tuvalu and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ signed the Falepili Union treaty.

9. Over 80 percent of the residents of Tuvalu applied for a “climate \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

**D. Respond to the following question in paragraph form. *(Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.)***

10. As you see it, what is the significance of the Falepili Union treaty? Give reasons to explain your answer.

**Assessment Rubric**

This rubric may be helpful in providing students with formative, strength-based feedback and/or assessing students’ responses holistically. This easy-to-modify activity is included in the doc file which you can download from:   
**www.lesplan.com/subscribers**

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|  | **Emerging** | **Developing** | **Proficient** | **Extending** |
| **Supports thinking** | Answers or reflections are brief and include obvious facts/details/ evidence. | Answers or reflections are general and supported with some relevant facts/details/evidence. | Answers or reflections are clearly supported with specific, relevant facts/details/evidence. | Answers or reflections are insightful and supported with specific, relevant facts/details/evidence. |
| **Shows understanding** | Responses show a basic understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are thoughtful and show a general understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are thoughtful and show a complete understanding of the text, topic, issue or message. | Responses are insightful and show a deep understanding the text, topic, issue or message. May synthesize ideas or explain the ‘so what’. |
| **Thinks  critically** | Makes straightforward connections or inferences. Focuses on retelling. | Makes logical connections to self (T:S) and/or background knowledge (T:S). Inferences are logical | Makes meaningful connections to self. Considers ideas between texts (T:T).  Inferences are plausible. | Makes powerful connections that go between texts and/or beyond the text (T:W).  Inferences are plausible and insightful. |



