

# Shifting Baselines



## Lesson at a Glance

The way we live, the things we do and the places that we live have changed drastically over the years. We need to know what the past like to be able to understand what kinds of changes are happening today.

## *Objectives*

Students will

- Interview an elder in the community to learn about the past.
- Design and carry out a baseline study.

## Background Information

A baseline is a reference point for measuring what changes have happened. Shifting baselines are the changes you see in something. An example of this might be the soccer team at the beginning of the season. The baseline would be what they were able to do at the beginning of the season, and the shifting baseline would be how they performed by the end of the season. In the science field it is a way of studying what is happening to an ecosystem. In order to know if and what are the changes, we need to know what it was like in the beginning. To be able to understand what changes have occurred over the years both on our land and sea ecosystems we need to know what the baseline is, what it was like in the beginning. Check out the [shiftingbaselines.org](http://shiftingbaselines.org) website for more information.

## Materials Needed

- Paper and Pencils

## Student Activities

### 1. Learning From the Past

Have students find a Grandparent or an elderly neighbor or friend to interview. Students are to ask them questions about a specific ecosystem. This could be the reef, a beach, a mountain, or valley. What was it like when they were young? Students then need to visit the same place and see what it is like today. Students are to find a



way to share this information. This could be a story, a chart, or a picture.

## 2. Baseline Studies

Find a site that the students would like to study. Have them figure out how to do a baseline study. Students need to chart or map the area, recording everything that is there. A real baseline study needs to go on for years, but have your students go back every so often to chart or map the area again. What has changed? Why do you think this has happened?

