

PLANET EARTH: HOME TO US ALL

INTRODUCTION:

A healthy environment is in everyone's best interest. It is also everyone's responsibility. It depends on people in less developed countries whose struggle to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life threatens Earth's systems with irreparable damage. It also depends on people in highly developed countries whose standards of living and levels of consumption place enormous strains on the Earth's resources and global life support systems. Earth is home to us all; therefore, we must all work together to ensure that future generations will be able to meet their basic human needs. In this learning activity, students will collaborate on an action plan for responsible global citizenship. Reflecting on concepts introduced in earlier lessons and case studies, they will develop a series of public service announcements informing the public at large of our shared responsibility and our need to act—as individuals, as a country, and as a global community.

Grade Level:

6-12

Time Required:

One to two class periods

Standards Addressed:

Geography standards

18.

Knows and understands how to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future

Science standards

F, grades 5-8

Science and technology in society

F, grades 5-8

Natural resources, Environmental quality, and Science and technology in local, national, and global challenges

Skills:

This learning activity requires students to:

- ask geographic questions
- acquire geographic information
- organize geographic information
- analyze geographic information
- answer geographic questions

Vocabulary/Concepts:

global environmental stress, basic human needs, sustainable development

Objectives:

As a result of completing this learning activity, students will:

- formulate a sustainable action plan to address environmental stress.
- create a public service announcement to promote awareness and action focusing on one area of environmental concern.

Materials:

- Transparency of the “lifeboat” cartoon
- Copies of Handout, “Sustainable Action for the Global Environment”
- Chart paper
- Paper, pens, colored pencils, markers

THE LEARNING ACTIVITY:

Background:

An essential message of Earth Day and of the lessons in this unit is the concept of “connectedness.” There are two perspectives on the “lifeboat” symbol. One perspective suggests that those who are in the lifeboat, i.e., those with access to basic needs and more, will survive while those outside the lifeboat face a grim future with little hope. A counter perspective, however, sees the entire planet as a single lifeboat in which we all, rich and poor alike, ultimately share a common fate. Our futures are connected because damage to any one Earth system has an impact on every other system. And it is upon these interconnected systems of land, water, and air that all life depends.

PLANET EARTH: HOME TO US ALL *continued*

Introducing the Activity:

It is important for the future well-being of the Earth that people understand that all systems, including human systems, are connected, and that just as we all depend on the environment to meet our basic needs, so do we all share responsibility for the health of the environment. From such an understanding will positive actions emerge to correct the damage already done and to develop sustainable strategies for meeting the needs of all people.

Put the “lifeboat” cartoon on an overhead and read the narrative passage to the class.

- What is the cartoonist trying to say?
- How does this cartoon relate to the lessons we have studied up to this point?

Call attention to the fact that the cartoonist has projected an important message through a single picture. Note that in today’s world of images and sound bites, one of the most effective ways to get across important messages is through advertisements and public service announcements that depend heavily on images, symbols, and short phrases that catch and hold the attention of the viewer while delivering a crucial message.

Executing the Activity:

1. Distribute copies of the chart, “Sustainable Action for the Global Environment.” Briefly discuss the headings on the chart. Then encourage students, working in six small groups, to draw on the earlier lessons to generate ideas in response to each heading. Have students recreate this chart on poster paper with markers and record their responses there.

For example, under the heading “How do we correct what we have done?” students might suggest actions to correct air quality problems. They should consider actions that could be taken at the individual level, at the national level, and at the global level. As they deliberate, they should focus on issues of feasibility and sustainability. They should also take into account the costs and benefits of the action they propose.

Under the heading “How do we meet human needs in environmentally sustainable ways?” students might suggest actions to ensure an adequate food supply for all people without damaging Earth’s systems. Again, they should consider actions that could be taken at the individual level, at the national level, and at the global level. As they deliberate, they should focus on issues of feasibility and sustainability. They should also take into account the costs and benefits of the action they propose.

2. When the charts are completed, discuss the responses and record class ideas on a large sheet of chart paper. When the chart is finished, cut out the square and give each group one of the numbered boxes. Then assign each of the six groups one box from the chart. The task of each group is to create a Public Service Announcement (PSA), selecting one idea from the box. The purpose of the PSA is to:

- a) inform the public of one specific environmental issue; and
- b) propose specific actions that can be taken in response to the issue.

Provide examples of the different types of PSAs that students could develop (e.g., television commercial, radio announcement, message, Internet page, poster, cartoon, magazine or newspaper advertisement, etc.). Students should be encouraged to apply creativity and hard facts to produce an engaging message that presents the current situation and offers positive alternatives for the future.

Concluding the Activity:

After presentations of PSAs have been made to the class, arrange for students to present their PSAs to the school or post them on a school bulletin board. Other options may be to inquire at a local public library about posting the students’ work or contact a local radio or television station about airing student work.

Follow-up:

Invite a panel of students and faculty (and/or local civic leaders) to select the best PSAs. Submit their choices to Population Reference Bureau. The best submissions will be recognized on PRB’s Internet site. Students who submit their PSAs will receive a certificate. The deadline for submissions to PRB is May 15, 1997.

Extensions & Variations:

For classes with on-line access, the public service announcements could be prepared in digital format and submitted to PRB via the Internet. Send message to: cstauffer@prb.org.



LESSON 4, HANDOUT

Sustainable Action for the Global Environment		
How do we ... How do we respond as ...	Correct what we have done to the environment?	Meet human needs in environmentally sustainable ways?
Individuals	1	2
A country	3	4
A global community	5	6