

FINDING ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY ALTERNATIVES

SECONDARY LEVEL

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL #7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Activity Snapshot:

Students will split into five separate groups, which will each be responsible for understanding how one aspect of their lives contributes to climate change. Each group will share their results through a skit in the form of a commercial, demonstrating how youth can reduce their consumption and carbon emissions through a change in that particular aspect of their lives.

Rationale:

Complex environmental issues can seem like problems without easy solutions. Ultimately, the solutions to these issues lie in the decisions of regular people. The average American produces 20 tonnes of carbon emissions each year. This number could easily be reduced if we all made environmentally friendly choices, which would help to slow or eliminate climate change.

Objectives:

- Students will understand how individual actions contribute to environmental degradation.
- Students will generate strategies for reducing their impact on the environment in different aspects of their lives.

Time: Two 60-minute periods

Materials: blackboard and access to Internet or library to conduct research

Steps:

1. Provide a brief recap of global warming and climate change. See handout/worksheet G18: The Local Experience: Our Own “Environmental Report Card.” (Note: Students may have seen the popular documentary, **An Inconvenient Truth**, created by former US vice-president Al Gore.)
2. Write these five categories as headings on the board: Household Activities, School Activities, Transportation, Food and Drink, Entertainment and Fashion.
3. In a large discussion, identify two to three activities or products for each of these categories that consume resources, create emissions and/or contribute to climate change. Provide the following examples if students are slow to provide answers:
 - Household Activities: heating, cooling, lighting
 - School Activities: paper use, lighting, heating (can also be specific to your school)
 - Transportation: Idling engines in cars or buses, traveling via airplanes vs. cars vs. carpooling vs. buses vs. cycling or walking, paving and maintaining roads
 - Food or Drink: heavily processed food, food with lots of packaging, food that is shipped from far away vs. locally grown, organic foods
 - Entertainment and Fashion: Buying new clothes all the time vs. buying vintage or used clothes, buying clothes that are heavily processed vs. buying organic clothes

Transition:

4. Split the class into five groups and assign one of the five categories to each group.
5. Provide each group with resources for research—either access to the Internet or the library. Research can also be completed as homework if necessary. Each group will choose one to two aspects of their category as a focus for their research. They will choose a specific problem—like consumption of energy through heating—and then use their research time to learn about more environmentally friendly alternatives (i.e., solar or wind power).
6. Each group will prepare a skit in the form of a commercial about their alternative, environmentally friendly practice. The purpose of the skit is to educate the rest of the class about a small change they can make in one aspect of their life to reduce their consumption.

Closure:

Debrief the activity by asking each group to share the most surprising thing they learned during their research. Why did it surprise them? What will they do differently in the future based on what they have learned?

Assessment Suggestions:

- Depending on the experience level of your students, establish assessment criteria that students can work from while creating their skits (required length, use of visual aids/technology, amount of factual detail required etc.).

Extension activities:

- a. Create a list for the classroom wall with five to 10 actions that students will take to reduce their consumption. Each student can sign the bottom of the list demonstrating their personal commitment to their action.
- b. Students can perform the most effective skit at the next school assembly, with the goal of raising awareness amongst the student body.

Useful Links:

Climate Action Network: <http://www.climatenetwork.org/>

Energy Saving Trust: <http://www.est.org.uk/>

Renew-Reuse-Recycle: <http://www.renew-reuse-recycle.com/>

United Nations Environmental Program: <http://www.unep.org/>

International Institute for Sustainable Development: <http://www.iisd.org/climate/>

US Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.epa.gov/>

To measure your own ecological footprint, visit www.earthday.net/footprint/index.asp.