

Earth care lesson plan for Junior High and Youth groups

Prepared by David Radcliff

Introduction to topic—tell a funny story about yourself related to earth care; share a new fact you've learned about threats to the earth; or choose some other engaging way to introduce the topic.

(One from my experience: Recently I learned that they counted 2.3 billion pieces of plastic flowing out of two Californian rivers over three days into the Pacific Ocean. This of course contributes to a floating garbage patch in the Pacific twice the size of Texas. So I recommitted myself to avoiding plastic products. Coincidentally, I was in Southern CA doing school presentations not long after that, had given six 45-minute talks, and had an hour drive back to the place I was staying. The warm sun was shining in the windshield, I had been talking all day—my throat was parched. So I began looking for a McDonalds with the \$1 drinks. It wasn't that hard to find one, so I pulled in. Of course they want to serve you the dollar drink in a big plastic cup, so I always look for an abandoned one on a table, take it to the restroom and wash it, then use this one. On this day, there was none to be seen. So I tried Plan B—the trashcans. I glanced in several cans, again, no cup. But I remembered that I'd seen a dumpster out back as I was walking in. So out I went, slipped into the enclosure (conveniently surrounded by plastic screening) and snatched one of the hundreds in there. I took it in, went to the restroom and washed it with soap and warm water, then took it up to the counter. "I just want one of those dollar drinks," I said to the clerk, "and I brought my own cup." "Then it will be free," he said. I guess they had a policy of free refills when you bring back a cup from a previous trip. Yes, I know that's not exactly what happened here... but maybe sometimes our good behavior just gets rewarded... ☺)

Draw the planet, and invite group to call out various parts of the earth's living system—what does the earth need to make it a living, breathing system? (trees, water, sun, fish, insects, soil, etc.

Were humans included? If so, that can be a bit of a discussion in itself—does the earth need us here? would it be better or worse off without us? (if this is a religious group, ask why did God put us here anyway? are we living up to what God had in mind?)

Then invite the group to talk about parts of the planet that are struggling—or at risk in some way. (the list is long: coral reefs, waterways, species, swamps and wetlands, fish, frogs, global warming, etc.)

An interesting case in point: scallops are disappearing from the Atlantic Ocean. Why? Because of the near-disappearance of large sharks like the Hammerhead and Great White from the Atlantic Ocean. Today, these sharks are 99 percent gone. It happened like this—cod had been a favorite of commercial fishermen. But because fishing has become so efficient, during the latter half of the 20th Century cod was fished nearly to extinction. Looking for another source of income, the fishing industry turned to sharks. A certain part of the shark brings \$150 a pound—what part is it? Fins—for shark fin soup. 70-80 million sharks are killed every year for this purpose. (The body of the shark is then thrown back in the water.) Because the sharks are no longer there, other sea fish the sharks used to eat like the skates and rays began to overpopulate—and they like scallops. Now there are many fewer scallops in the ocean—or at LongJohn Silvers...(at least scallops from the Atlantic). This is a good illustration of the interrelatedness of things—and the human impact. Also a good way to introduce the topic of "keystone species"—those creatures at the top of the food chain—and the important role they

play.

Analysis: Next ask why all these systems are in trouble. What is causing the problems? Of course, it's us. Humans in general, but also people like us, as the most consuming country in the world. Poor people also cause environmental problems—for instance, poor people living near parks or protected areas around the world may feel that they have to go there to hunt or cut down trees or raise cattle in order to survive. So rich and poor hurt the environment; the poor because they must, the rich because they can.

Match games as a fun way for kids to see the impact of the US lifestyle. Put the pairs of numbers on one side of the blackboard and the corresponding words on the other—not matching, of course—and let the kids try to guess which set of numbers goes with which set of statements, drawing lines to match up correct guesses.

- 600/1; pounds of paper consumed per person in US every year (packaging, writing, printing, etc.) / billion trees needed per year to make paper for US (3.5 pounds of wood and 10 pounds of water to make every pound of paper)
- 35/1.1; average gallons of water used in 7-minute shower / billions of people in the world who don't have that much clean water in a week
- 3 trillion/3 trillion; number of miles we drive altogether in the US every year; pounds of CO2 that much driving creates
- 220/1; cubic kilometers of water melting from Greenland per year (if it ever all melts, will cause 23 foot rise in global sea levels) / cubic km. used by Los Angeles per year
- 50/30; million water bottles trashed per day in US / how many days it would take to reach the moon if this many water bottles were stacked on top of each other
- 300 million/1500; how many pounds of food we waste in the United States every day; how many gallons of water does it take to produce one person's food for a day? (mostly for meat—it can take 1000 gallons of water to produce a pound of beef)
- 4/1000 hours the average US teenager spends with electronic media per day; pounds of pollution created if a video game is let on for a year

Zadie's story

"I first heard of the negative effects of palm oil plantations from David Radcliff; it devastated me to know what was happening. Palm oil is a type of vegetable oil that comes from the palm fruit and can only be cultivated in tropical areas or wherever there is lots of heat and rainfall. Seventeen countries produce palm oil today but the top two producers are Indonesia and Malaysia. To make way for palm oil plantations, rainforests are being destroyed with the slash and burn method. One species in particular being affected is the Orangutan. Not only is this species losing its habitat, but about 1,500 orangutans are being clubbed to death each year because they find themselves unwanted on palm oil plantations.

Palm oil is an ingredient in up to 50 percent of our products and foods. Tragically, the first food that I had found out contained palm oil was ice cream—which in my church (Church of the Brethren) is kind of like a sacred substance! I soon began checking all the labels on the foods that my mom and I bought and found out that almost everything contained palm oil; it became super hard to avoid. I then downloaded an app on my phone that my aunt had told me about called 'Buycott'. It let me join campaigns and scan food labels to warn me if any ingredients or even the companies making that product went against any of the campaigns that I had joined.

Not too long ago I went to the grocery store with my mom to help her shop. Almost EVERYthing that I scanned clashed with at least one of my 'Buycott' campaigns—I left the store that day extremely frustrated, feeling like there wasn't much I could do unless I had access to local, organic produce. An

alternative is to buy products made with palm oil obtained through just and sustainable measures. This offers the efficiency of the palm oil but without the devastating effects. Palm oil may be in high demand but the need to keep and sustain our rainforests is crucial to both us and to the planet."

-Zadie Smith is from Mont Ida, KS

If time allows, have them do their own [Ecological Footprint](#). When finished, get a show of hands of youth who fit in various levels. Maybe ask them what their "downfall" was (for most, it will be vehicles).

"What can we do?" What are the biggest human impacts on our earth?

- Have the group list some of our worst environmental practices. (car driving, meat-eating, material consumption, wasting energy, big houses, etc.)
- Why should we care what happens to the planet? human health (air pollution will kill 7 million people around the world this year), justice (global warming will hurt the poorest people the most—by the middle of the century, Africa 20 percent of its grain production due to climate change of grain a year due to climate change), creatures' health/survival (there are 50 percent fewer living creatures on earth than in 1970), God's command to "till and keep (guard, protect)", future generations

Here's a story to tell about native people and their knowledge of the rainforest—and why the people and the forest are important to protect.

David Radcliff tells about how a friend of New Community Project in the Ecuadorian Amazon saved a young girl's life:

A woman arrived at the camp of NCP's host organization SELVA just outside the rainforest carrying her unconscious 14 year-old daughter in her arms. The girl had been bitten by a poisonous snake. (Snakebites are the most common cause of death in the rainforest.) The mother had already take the girl to a local hospital and to the oil company clinic, and was turned away at both places—seems neither wanted a nearly-dead girl on their hands. Luckily, a Cofan medicine man named Aurelio (from a nearby village the NCP group visits on their trips to the rainforest) was present at the time. The Cofan are one of the ancient tribes of the Amazon, and these medicine men know the secrets of the forest.

As SELVA staff quickly readied a vehicle to run the girl to a larger city an hour away, Aurelio went to a nearby *cacao de monte* tree and scraped off some of its bark. He then came to the girl and squeezed a bit of the sap into her mouth.

Just then, the vehicle appeared and off they rushed toward the hospital. They had been traveling only 15 minutes when the girl regained her consciousness and began to get better. They proceeded to the hospital, but her life had been saved by Aurelio—and this plant from the forest.

As many as 10 million native people lived in South America prior to European arrival 500 years ago. Today there are some 200,000—they have been destroyed by disease and driven away from their lands--often by cattle ranching or oil exploration. Why is important that these people continue to survive?

(for religious group) If God were giving us 10 Commandments for taking care of the earth, what would some of them be? (List as the group shares ideas.)

Make a list of things the average youth can do in their daily routine to take better care of the

earth.

Are they willing to make personal pledges to take better care of the earth? If so, these could be written down, then mailed back to them in a month. NCP also has wristbands made by the Cofan of rainforest plants that can be purchased and used as a reminder of our connection to the rainforest, and the money from their sale goes to help native people.

Action option I: have the group raise money for the [If a Tree Falls...](#) project of the New Community Project, protecting and replanting forests in Myanmar, South Sudan and the Amazon

Action option II: contact a local stream preservation group and ask how youth can be involved in helping take care of a local waterway (Trout Unlimited might be a good place to start)

Action option III: Connect with NCP—join a [Learning Tour](#) to the Amazon or Arctic; organize a visit to one of our [Sustainable Living Centers](#) for a day of work and learning; invite David Radcliff to [speak at your school](#)

Action option IIII: ask to lead the worship service at your place of worship, using [NCP resources](#)

Close by handing out Save the Earth post-it notes, endangered species bookmarks, etc. (available from NCP)