

## Care for Creation 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.

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. When they get to "humans" 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? 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 \$28 a pound—what part is it? Fins—for shark fin soup. (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 over-populate—and they like scallops. Now there are many fewer scallops in the ocean—or at Long John 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, but also US citizens, as the most consuming people 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.

- 760/1; per person (pounds) paper consumption in US every year (seven times the world average) / 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
- 60/20; number of car trips per week per household-US / pounds of CO2 emitted per gallon of gas
- 19/160; tons of CO2 per person per year in the US / thousands of people in the world already dying every year because of global warming
- 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) / cubit km. used by Los Angeles per year

- 40/1.5; million water bottles trashed per day in US (if end-to-end, would reach from Washington Monument to Grand Canyon and back) / million barrels of oil to make water bottles per year in the US
- 57/55; million cattle in former Amazon rainforest / square feet of rainforest needed for one quarter-pounder (if beef is from rainforest)

Then have them do their own Ecological Footprint (request from NCP or download from website). When finished, get a show of hands at the end 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 God's 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, justice [global warming will hurt the poorest people the most—Africa will lose over 250 millions tons of grain a year due to climate change], species' health/survival, God's command to "till and keep", 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 of the New Community Project tells about something that happened in May 2007, just after their Learning Tour group had left the Amazon Rainforest.

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. (Snake bites 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 had visited several days before) was present at the time. The Cofan are one of the ancient tribes of the Amazon.

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?

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. They could also Join the Band—NCP's pledge to live more responsibly (if you wanted to do this, I'd send some wristbands in advance). <http://newcommunityproject.org/joinband.shtml> The wristbands are a nice connection to the rainforest, and the money from their sale goes to help native people.

Action option I: NCP has post-cards with the picture of Gwich'in girls and a caribou on the front. The cards ask Congress to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil drilling. These could be filled out and then sent to the appropriate Senators.

Action option II: have the group raise money for the *If a Tree Falls...* project of the New Community Project, protecting and replanting forests. Learn more about this program from a link off the Special Projects page of the NCP website.

Close by handing out Save the Earth post-it notes, endangered species bookmarks, etc.