

Rethink Activity:

Environmental Responsibility

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DESCRIPTION

This activity encourages students to think about environmental responsibility from the perspective of individuals, communities, industries, and governments and how everyone has a role in protecting the environment. Students will work together, in small groups, to brainstorm examples of environmental responsibility for their assigned level of responsibility. Students will learn that everyone, from individuals to government, must take responsibility to protect the environment.

CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Environmental Science 3205:

- 1.18** Identify individual impacts on the environment using the concept of ecological footprint.
- 1.20** Describe environmental responsibility. Include the roles of:
(I) individuals, (II) communities, (III) industries, and (IV) governments.



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

WHAT IS AN ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT?

An ecological footprint is a measure of human demand on the earth's ecosystems. It compares human demand with planet earth's ecological capacity to regenerate. It represents the amount of land and ocean area needed to regenerate the resources a human population consumes and to absorb and render harmless the corresponding waste. Ecological footprint estimates the amount of land and ocean area required to sustain an individual's consumption pattern and waste on an annual basis.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY?

Environmental responsibility is our duty to protect and improve our environment. An environmentally responsible individual, industry, community, or government assesses their environmental sustainability and applies this knowledge to their decision-making. When making decisions, we should always practice the *precautionary principle* to ensure that our actions do not have negative impacts on the environment. Using the "precautionary principle" when the environmental impact is uncertain, means that we take action to avoid any negative impacts, even if there is no proof that there will be a negative outcome caused by our action.

There are four different levels of environmental responsibility: individual, community, industry, and government.

INDIVIDUAL

As individuals, the choices we make everyday can have a great impact on the earth. If we rethink our actions, we can reduce our environmental impact.

- **Reduce waste** - Reduce, reuse, recycle, compost, and be a responsible consumer.
- **Conserve energy** - Turn off lights and computers, install energy-saving devices, or wash laundry in cold water.
- **Conserve water** - Limit shower times, run dishwashers only when full, keep a pitcher of cool water in the fridge rather than running the tap, or repair leaky faucets.
- **Properly dispose of items** - Use household hazardous waste (HHW) collection facilities, recycle, or donate unwanted items.
- **Get involved** - Start or join an environmental club (at school or in the community.)
- **Educate** - Educate yourself and others, and help to spread the word on environmental issues.

COMMUNITY

Community leaders have the ability to influence residents and businesses and reduce the community's overall environmental impact by providing environmentally responsible services and educational programs.

- **Waste management** - Curbside recycling or drop-off facilities, community compost sites, engineered landfill sites, hazardous waste, and electronic waste collection facilities.
- **Water conservation** - Regulations, tips, incentives, and fines.
- **Community greening projects** - Composting programs, beautification projects, community vegetable gardens, and litter collection.
- **Educational programs** - Provide residents with education on conservation, waste reduction, recycling programs, and local environmental issues.

INDUSTRY

Industries have the ability to sustainably manage operations, meet or exceed government environmental regulations and standards, become corporate eco-citizens, and promote positive environmental change.

- **Meet environmental standards** - Conduct Environmental Impact Assessments, join the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), or get LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification.
- **Go green at work** - Start or support a Green Team, develop a green procurement policy, initiate a waste audit, or promote waste reduction and water and energy conservation.
- **Support communities** - Provide financial and in-kind support to local environmental initiatives or initiate community partnerships.
- **Manage resources responsibly** - Practice the precautionary principle, mitigate impacts, and implement sustainable practices for harvesting of timber, marine and other resources.

GOVERNMENT

Governments have the ability to create and enforce environmental legislation and influence all other levels (individuals, communities, and industries) to reduce their environmental impact.

- **Environmental conservation** - Protect habitat and species, practice the precautionary principle and mitigate negative environmental impacts.
- **Natural resource management** - Research sustainable practices and implement the most environmentally-sound options for harvesting of timber, marine and other resources.
- **Policies and regulations** - Develop, implement and enforce policies and regulations on waste management and water and energy conservation.
- **Community involvement** - Support communities, businesses and NGOs (non-governmental organizations).
- **Alternative energy** - Research and implement programs to harness wind and solar energy.
- **Education** - Participate in and support research and education, attend environmental conferences, communicate environmental agendas and information to staff, work with Government departments, and publish research and results.



PROCEDURE

1. Divide students into four groups. Assign each group a different level of environmental responsibility (individual, community, industry, and government). Provide the students with examples of individuals, communities, industries, and governments to facilitate role playing.
2. Ask students to brainstorm with their group members and discuss examples of environmental responsibilities that are applicable to their assigned level. Provide the class with 10 minutes for a group discussion, allowing enough time to discuss examples from all four levels of environmental responsibility. Explain to the students that they should include waste reduction, energy conservation, water conservation, carbon emission reduction, and other applicable environmental considerations.
3. After the groups have discussed their ideas, ask each group to share their ideas with the rest of the class. Lead a class discussion for each specific level of responsibility, inviting the remaining groups to get involved with the discussion and share their ideas.



INFORMATION

For more information on this Rethink Activity, please contact MMSB:

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