

Ecological Empowerment



Helping Kids Help the Environment
Lesson One: Environmental Citizenship



Topic: Environmental Citizenship
Ages: 6-11 years
Time Allotment: TBD by Participating Educator

Minimum Suggested Time Frame

Three 45-60 minute sessions broken down into the following components:

- Introductory Activity / READ Component
- DO Component
- Environmental Citizenship Pledge

Further time will be needed should you choose to partake in the following activities:

- Additional Technology Extension
- Culminating Community Volunteering Connection Component

OVERVIEW

Citizenship is often a complex concept for young children to grasp because this concept is not concrete or tangible. Therefore, introducing the related concept of environmental citizenship may also be challenging to present to children. In this multi-step lesson, children will participate in a series of literacy-based multimedia, online, and hands-on learning experiences to examine the concept of environmental citizenship. Voluntary opportunities for volunteering within local communities will be presented to the children.

Integrated Curricula

Social Studies / Civics, Language Arts, Environmental Science

Learning Objectives

The children will:

- understand what it means to volunteer.
- realize that they can start volunteering in their own local neighborhoods.
- recognize that through volunteering and helping the environment, they can act as responsible citizens to protect their local communities.
- extend their understanding of citizenship in relation to the environment.

Web Sites

American Community Garden Association at <http://www.communitygarden.org/>

This web site provides contact information about community gardens across America.

Backyard Jungle at <http://pbskids.org/backyardjungle/>

This web site encourages children to explore the environments in their own backyards and neighborhoods.

Big Apple History at <http://pbskids.org/bigapplehistory/index-flash.html>

This web site features a hands-on activity the students can complete entitled "Plan a Park," as well as a resource for after-school practitioners, educators, and parents entitled "Primer on Volunteerism."

Democrat & Chronicle at

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/ads/flowercity/2005/2/about.shtml>

This web site provides a broader spectrum of environmentally-related volunteer opportunities for children and adults in and around Rochester, New York.

Flower City Kids at <http://www.frontiernet.net/~rtt/flowerindex.html>

This web site provides information about the Flower City Kids program in Rochester, New York.

The American Forum: Global Education at
<http://www.globaled.org/myself/planningapark.html>

This web site provides adults with details about "Planning a Park" with children.

Materials

(For each student)

- Newsprint, poster board, or construction paper
- Crayons/markers
- Pencil
- Eraser

(For the group)

- At least one copy of *City Green* by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan or a copy of an alternate thematically-related storybook.
- Computer(s) with Internet access
- Chart Paper / Markers

Preparation for Participating Educator

- Prior to teaching this lesson, it may be helpful to bookmark the web sites to be used during the course of this lesson on the computer(s) you and the children will be using.
- Have art materials (paper, crayons / markers, etc...) accessible and ready to be distributed to the children.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Share the following adult version definition of environmental citizenship with the children in your care:

Environmental citizenship is a personal commitment to learning more about the environment and to taking responsible environmental action. Environmental citizenship encourages individuals, communities, and organizations to think about the environmental rights and responsibilities we all have as residents of planet Earth. Environmental citizenship means caring for the Earth.

(Source of Definition: http://www.ec.gc.ca/water/en/info/pubs/mountain/e_contnt.htm)

After reading the adult version, encourage the children to tell you what they think the definition means.

- Point out words within the above definition, such as "responsible" and "responsibilities," that the children may be familiar with from previous experiences.
- Ask the children for some of the chores or tasks that they are responsible for completing at home or at school.
- Extend and expand the children's responsibilities to doing these types of tasks to tasks they can complete while trying to take care of the outside world in their own backyards, neighborhoods, and communities.

Keeping in mind the ages of the children in your care, rephrase and rewrite the definition in kid-friendly words that the children understand and provide you with during the course of discussion.

Example of a sample definition rewritten in kid-friendly language:

Kids and adults practice environmental citizenship when they do things to protect and keep planet Earth safe. Kids and adults can make decisions about the kinds of things they do at home, at school, and at work when trying to keep Earth clean. It is everyone's responsibility to work together to keep our planet safe.

Explain to the children that they will be shown several things they can do around their neighborhoods and in their local communities to help protect the environment.

READING ACTIVITY

Pre-Reading Experience

Access the prior knowledge of the children in your care by asking some questions related to what they already know about the topic of gardening.

Using the information the children provide, brainstorm and write a list of things that the children already know about gardening on chart paper or poster board.

Keep this list visible throughout the course of this series of lessons about environmental citizenship. Be sure to encourage children to add more details about the topic of gardening throughout this series of lessons.

Read Aloud

In a whole group setting, read aloud *City Green* by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan or a different thematically-related storybook to the children.

Here are some other possible alternate titles for books about community gardening:

- *How Groundhog's Garden Grew* written by Lynne Cherry
- *Serving Your Community* written by Christin Ditchfield
- *Greening the City Streets: The Story of Community Gardens* written by Barbara A. Huff
- *The City Gardener* written by Matt James
- *Our Community Garden* written by Barbara Pollak

One way to engage your young listeners during the reading experience is to pause at a strategic point in the story and to ask the children a question related to something critical in the story.

After you finish reading the entire story, it is also helpful to ask the children several comprehension questions to gauge the children's level of understanding.

Here are some examples of comprehension questions you might want to ask during or after reading the story:

- Why would people want to work in a garden without being paid?
- How can a community or neighborhood benefit from a shared garden?
- How can we apply the saying, "many hands make light work" to organizing a community garden?

DOING ACTIVITY

Planting a community garden and planning a park are similar processes requiring organization and forethought.

Extend the children's learning experience by encouraging them to plan their own parks. The children can choose whether or not to include community gardens within their own personal parks.

1. Access the Big Apple History web site at the following URL:
<http://pbskids.org/bigapplehistory/index-flash.html>
2. Once at the web site, click on the blimp labeled "Activities."
3. Once you have been redirected to the next section, you will find several pull-down menus under the "All Activities" section.
4. Click on the third pull-down menu labeled "Building the Big Apple."
5. On the pull-down menu, click on the heading "Plan a Park."
6. After a brief description about how Central Park was started in New York City, you will find that several steps have been outlined for the children to follow:
Step 1: Thinking About Parks
Step 2: Getting Community Feedback

Step 3: Designing the Park

Depending on the range of ages for the children in your care, you can progress through these steps in a large group setting, or you can group older students together into several small groups to work.

After discussing the issues brought up in Step 3, encourage the children to work individually or in small groups to design their own parks.

Using newsprint, poster board, or construction paper along with pencils, crayons, and markers, invite the children to draw representations of their individual parks.

After the parks have been designed and the drawings are complete, the children can share their designs with the group and explain the rationale behind choosing certain park features.

The following website may serve as a helpful resource should you need suggestions on how to further guide students through a hands-on project such as planning a park:

The American Forum: Global Education at
<http://www.globaled.org/myself/planningapark.html>

ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP PLEDGE

After introducing the concept of environmental citizenship to the children in your care, reading DiSalvo's storybook about a neighborhood that volunteers its time and resources to create an inspiring community garden, and having the children plan their own parks, invite the children in your care to make a commitment to environmental citizenship.

Using chart paper and markers, you can have the children help you come up with the wording for one inclusive classroom pledge, or each child can come up with his or her own individual environmental citizenship pledge.

To see an example of an environmental citizenship pledge, access the following URL:

<http://www.co.broward.fl.us/kids/ce2.htm>

Under the heading "School Year 2002-03, click "Character Education Newsletter for Elementary School Students."

The first article entitled, "Behaving in a way and doing things which others in your community expect of you" describes how to write an environmental citizenship pledge with children in your care.

ADDITIONAL TECHNOLOGY EXTENSION

Introduce the children to *Backyard Jungle*, a PBS Kids Go! web site.

Access the following URL using the Internet: <http://pbskids.org/backyardjungle/>

Backyard Jungle is a kid-friendly web site where users can load photos, drawings, and descriptions about the natural surroundings where they live, their "backyard." Users manage and map their own information, share it with other people who visit the web site, and visit and comment on the backyards of other users as well. All the content on the web site is loaded by users themselves. The children can design multiple virtual "backyards" using this program.

CULMINATING COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING CONNECTIONS: ROCHESTER, NY

Participating in a local volunteer program can help children extend and apply the learning that has taken place through the READ & DO components.

Using the Internet, visit the following web sites to learn more about volunteering opportunities in the Greater Rochester Community:

<http://www.frontiernet.net/~rtl/flowerindex.html>

Flower City Kids are students in the City of Rochester public, private and parochial schools, grades pre-K through six. Flower City Kids is a project co-sponsored by the Frontier Pioneers, the City of Rochester Department of Parks, Recreation and Human Services, and the Cornell Cooperative Extension.

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/ads/flowercity/2005/2about.shtml>

Click on the following link: "Events and Volunteer Activities"

Help kids investigate the following volunteer activities to determine which activities might closely match the lesson content:

- Rochester Blossoms!
- Flower City Kids Picnic and Planting Day
- Community Garden

CULMINATING COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING CONNECTIONS: NATIONWIDE

You can contact the American Community Garden Association for information regarding community garden projects in your area.

American Community Garden Association
C/O Council on the Environment of New York City
51 Chambers Street, Suite 228
New York, NY 10007

<http://www.communitygarden.org/>

CULMINATING EXPERIENCE

Invite children to apply their knowledge of environmental citizenship to the scenarios presented by Eeko World.



What if you could create your very own, one-of-a-kind creature and help it survive in a topsy-turvy environment? The new EekoWorld website is geared toward kids ages six to nine and lets them explore ecosystems, environmental issues and conservation while playing two interconnected online games.

EekoCreature lets kids create unique critters, unleash them on the world and help make environmentally-correct choices like limiting clear cutting or supporting the creation of national parks to keep their creature healthy. And in EekoHouse, the kids can earn health points by conserving in everyday ways like recycling, shutting faucets and saving energy.

The highly interactive and customized game play is just one avenue to engage this age group. The EekoWorld website also features animated tours of ecosystems — from problems and solutions to actions kids can take — as well as animated demonstrations of recycling, water cycles and plant/animal food chains explained by kids, to kids. As a staple of PBS websites, EekoWorld offers rich parent and teacher resources including lesson plans, activities and external reading to encourage kids to be more aware of their environmental impact and take steps to keep the Earth healthy.

