

Sustainability and Stewardship initiatives for Elementary School Students

Background: What Are We Talking About?

According to Environmental Education Ontario, *sustainability* is the concept of meeting the needs of today without reducing the quality of life for future generations.

To be sustainable, our society needs to integrate a **healthy economy** with **environmental integrity** and **human well being** in **viable communities**.

To create a sustainable society, our use, conservation and improvement of resources must maintain the ecological processes on which life depends as well as enhancing the overall quality of life, both now and in the future.



Environmental stewardship – responsible management of the Earth’s resources for the benefit of present and future generations of people, plants and animals – is a major component of sustainability.

Environmental literacy is an understanding of (1) the relationships between human and natural systems, (2) the local and global environmental impacts of economic and social systems, and (3) ways to minimize human impacts on natural systems through design, decision-making and lifestyle choices. Environmental literacy is the first step in building a sustainable society where individuals practice environmental stewardship.

Green Projects for Kids – Beyond Recycling

You are probably already recycling mixed paper in your classroom. Your school may even be collecting bottles, cans and juice boxes to raise money. But there is much more that your class and school can do! Here are some ideas for environmental initiatives; the links give additional information, instructions and, where available, lesson plans.

Getting Started

- ◆ Have the class take the David Suzuki Nature Challenge for Kids (covers all the key sustainability, stewardship and envirolit issues).
<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/kids/challenges/>

Animals, Plants, and Habitat

- ◆ Build and install bird-nesting boxes around the school property.
<http://www.hww.ca/hww2.asp?id=196>

- ◆ If bird feeders are allowed on your school grounds, install several and have the students participate in Project Feeder Watch.
<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/national/pfw.html>
- ◆ Start a native plant garden and/or create wildlife habitat on your school grounds (could be done by one or two classes or as a school wide initiative).
<http://www.evergreen.ca/en/lq/lq.html>
<http://www.geocities.com/sseagraves/ourenvironmentalcenter.htm>
(wonderful case study of a school garden and pond; excellent links)
- ◆ Have your primary or lower intermediate class “adopt” an endangered or threatened animal, such as a BC orca or a Vancouver Island marmot.
<http://www.killerwhale.org/>
<http://www.marmots.org/adopt.htm>
- ◆ If your intermediate class is studying salmon or sturgeon, consider “adopting” a local stream and helping to restore it as fish habitat, as some classes have done on Vancouver Island. The Pacific Salmon Foundation offers funding for schools and other community groups (perhaps your class could work with one) to rehabilitate streams, create community awareness, etc.
<http://www.psf.ca/home.html>
<http://psf.ca/07media/Total%20CSP%20Projects%202005.pdf>
(just a list, but gives some idea of what schools and other organizations have accomplished with PSF help)

Sustainable Arts

- ◆ Use fence art, murals or another art medium to encourage community awareness of an endangered species or ecosystem.
<http://www.streamofdreams.org/>
- ◆ Do some environmentally friendly arts and crafts or play a fun eco-game with your students.
<http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/pc/services/home/environ/ed/games2.htm>
- ◆ Work with parents, other classes and teachers and/or local community groups to set up a Reuse Centre for arts and crafts supplies.
<http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/education/pdfs/ArtReuseCentre.pdf> (startup template letter)

Waste Reduction

- ◆ Teach your class how to *pre-cycle* by implementing practices that minimize the need for recycling.
http://www.planetpals.com/EDrecyclethings/recycle_lesson.html (lots of great lesson plans, clip art, and ideas in addition to pre-cycling lesson)

- ◆ Start a papermaking project with scraps from the recycle bag (might be a way to raise money as well, exemplifying economic as well as environmental sustainability).
<http://www.windsor.k12.co.us/wms/blobmeyer/Papermaking/Classroom%20connection.htm>
- ◆ Set up a worm composter for the organic waste generated by one or more classes.
<http://www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html>

If you come up with a great project to add to this list, let us know!