

VIRTUES, VICES AND THE NATURAL WORLD



SESSION 1

- * Students to construct a presentation conveying the notion of 'flourishing earth' and 'suffering earth'.
- * Students to identify their emotions in relation to environmental issues – and the reasons for them.
- * Students to reflect on what their emotions say about them and their attitudes.

SESSION 2

- * How do the virtues they have explored relate to environmental issues? Put students in groups; give each group a virtue; ask each group to explain how environmental issues reflect failures of that virtue.
- * Give students the card sort exercise below. Which problems reflect failures of which virtues – some of the answers can be debated.

Environmental Virtues and Vices Word Sort

In groups, use these headings...

- * Environmental good sense
- * Environmental short-sightedness
- * Living moderately
- * Living excessively
- * Living gratefully
- * Living selfishly
- * Living courageously
- * Living cowardly
- * Living justly
- * Living unjustly

... to sort these examples, listed at random:

A spirit of humility, simplicity and gentleness, that recognises: that we are 'earthlings' who live in the world of nature, and not apart from it; that the environment is our home, and our resource, and these need to be balanced out.

Acquisitively grasping the earth's resources and hoarding them

Being attentive to what the earth and its atmosphere are telling us about the need to respect the universe

Blindness to the scope, beauty, power and majesty of the natural world

By advantaging, or failing to balance, one positive impact over many negative impacts

By balancing out the welfare of the planet as a web of natural systems, justice for the living, and justice for future generations

By enduring, being resilient and persevering in carrying out the good, and in realising justice

By failing to carry out good resolutions, or failing to stick to them, or failing to plan for realistic approaches

By failing to learn from our mistakes; and being slow in carrying out our lessons

By irresponsible use of the earth's resources, to the advantage of only a few

By putting short term gains over long term and sustainable development





By learning from experience – interference in one area of the ecosystem must be balanced with consequences to other areas

By responsible management of the environment for the good of all

By seeking innovative ways to reduce the environmental impact of production and consumption

Callous disregard for the order and harmony of the world

Cultivating an attitude of awe and wonder, that can appreciate the beauty of the environment and its restorative power

Damaging the environment

Defending the right to a safe and healthy environment

Enabling all to benefit from the goods of the earth, both present and future generations

Exploiting others, and putting the interests of production and consumption before their dignity

Greedily hoarding and grasping more than my fair share of the earth's resources

Greedy and grasping desire for things; hoarding and squandering, all in the pursuit of my instant gratification

Knowing when enough is enough, and not seeking for too much control, possession, or exploitation

Lazy, blind and malevolent; indifferent to the plight of others and to the damage inflicted by ourselves on the earth.

Letting the many suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of the few

Letting the victims of environmental damage bear the costs, rather than the perpetrators

Moderate and appropriate desire for food, fuel and things

Not becoming embittered and failing into despair

Nurturing the environment

Prioritising my right to a safe and healthy life over the rights of others

Punishing those who damage the environment

Remaining confident, bold and adventurous in tackling environmental issues

Remaining hopeful – and basing our hope on personal actions to make a difference

Seeking out parts of the natural world which convey a sense of peace and serenity

Showing a reckless disregard to environmental damage

Showing concern for the poorest, who suffer the worst effects of environmental damage

Taking my share of the earth's resources, and letting others take their fair share

With arrogance and an exploitative sense of superiority, engaging in inconsiderate exploitation and malicious destruction of the earth's resources.

Students to compare and debate answers on the succeeding slides.





SESSION 3

- * Students to identify an environmental project of concern to them – the smaller and the more local (including at home, then the better). Ensure students monitor and manage their projects.

SESSION 4

- * Students to research and present on environmental activists – how far do they model the virtues?

SESSION 5

- * The Bar Stool Debate – students to debate:
The ecological crisis is primarily a moral crisis.
- * Students to critique the views of George Carlin.

- * Students could use the *Good Sense Guides* and The *Golden Mean Tool* to work out what they will do and how.

- * Students to use the *Examined Life* tools to think through how to be more just in relation to the environment.

Further Reading

How to Connect With Nature, Tristan Gooley (School for Life) contains plenty of practical suggestions for connecting with nature.

