

Activity 1: STOP Treating Soil Like Dirt!

Teacher Information:

LAWAs the earth's population has increased, so has the need to expand the amount of land devoted to farming. To feed more and more people, we have ploughed new fields and have planted in some soils that can barely support life. We cut down forests and other vegetation to create more farmland, urban spaces for people and for building materials to build an increasing number of homes. These actions expose the soil to many hazards. Trees and plants anchor the soil; without vegetation holding soil it can be washed off hillsides by rain, winds blow it into the air, rivers, lakes and oceans. Some farming practices, although designed to grow more food, take away the soil's minerals and weakened the soil's ability to nourish us.

When we mistreat soil, it stops working for us. If we change the parts of the soil we harm the soil itself. Farmers understand this best. They know it takes hundreds of thousands of years to make soil. It can be lost or poisoned in only a few seasons. Without healthy soil, farmers cannot grow healthy crops, and produce the food we eat every day.

ACTIVITY 1

Suggested Timeline:

One period

Materials Required:

None

Setting:

Indoors

Summary:

Soil is the forgotten element of life; yet, without it, we would not have the many things plants provide for us.



Activity 1: STOP Treating Soil Like Dirt!

Student Activity:

Discuss how soil is treated today in construction, farming, transportation expansion, etc.

Discuss what students could do to improve and save the soil in their own backyard. Ask them “Do you and your family do any of these things?”

- Use fewer chemicals on lawns and gardens – although they fertilize grass and kill unwanted pests they also harm the soil, groundwater, wildlife and pets. Encourage your parents to have a chemical-free lawn. Only spread organic insecticides and herbicides and leave grass clippings on the lawn. Less raking, more time for playing!
- Plant native trees and shrubs in your yard. They need less water and fertilizers because they belong in your garden and backyard. Naturescape with native plants that are adapted to the local climatic conditions.
- Grow your own or buy organic foods. Check out the local service provided by organic grocers or suppliers.
- Make your own soil by composting using soil, raked leaves, grass clippings and food waste. Composting reduces garbage too.

Take a new look at soil outdoors. Notice how it feels. Educate your family and friends about soil. A healthy earth starts with healthy soil!

ACTIVITY 1

Suggested Timeline:
15-20 minutes

Materials Required:
None

Setting:
Indoors

Summary:
Through discussion students come up with ways they can conserve and enhance soil in their backyards.



Activity 2: Finding Home: A Mapping Activity

Teacher Information:

Everyone has a different perception of the place where they live and how they choose to interact with their natural environment. It is our experience with place that binds us to geography. We come to view our special places with a different set of values. Mapping helps to bring awareness to these differences and enables students to express an individual relationship with the place where they live and play.

This is the kind of activity that students learn from most when it is appropriately framed to give purpose to the task. A good way to introduce the activity is to have the teacher share his or her own Home Map. Note that too much structure can inhibit creativity but too little gets poor results.

Taken from “**Stories in the Land: A Place Based Environmental Education Anthology**”, by the Orion Society, Great Barrington, MA, 1998.

ACTIVITY 2

Suggested Timeline:

15 minutes to discuss the activity. The map is taken home as homework and should take 30 minutes to an hour.

30 minutes to share maps in the classroom.

30 minutes to discuss maps.

Materials Required:

Pencil, markers, crayons. One large piece of paper for each student. A blank wall on which to display finished maps, so encourage the students to make them beautiful.

Teacher made home map as an example.

Setting:

Indoors

Summary:

Students map their homes including any places of significance. It offers students the chance to identify with the special places that have been an important part of their childhood experiences.



Activity 2: Finding Home: A Mapping Activity

Student Activity:

Construct your own Home Map. Include places or geographic features, near or far, that are of particular relevance to your personal experience. Some may include areas far away up to a hundred kilometers away, while others can fill up an entire page with their backyard.

Have students share their maps revealing their special places to the rest of the group, which is great fuel for a group discussion.

Teachers can facilitate the conversation by asking questions:

- Why is a specific place more important than others?
- How has that place contributed to who you are?
- Do your special places tend to be natural or human made?
- What is it that makes your special place special?
- Who do you share your special place with?
- How do you take care of your special place now and so that you can visit it in the future?
- Write in a separate essay or discuss with the class how you would feel if your special place was in some way threatened.



Activity 3: Eco-Experts in the Field

Teacher Information:

Adopt a species from the field trip. Students research the subject and do a report on it. If time permits, have them make an oral presentation to the entire class. Subjects could include: Soil, Fungus and Bacteria in Nature, Lichen, Flowers, Trees, Birds, Amphibians, Reptiles, Mammals, Insects, and Invertebrates.

After completing the research, adopt your subject. How will you protect it so that it is there next year, 10 years and 100 years from now? Develop a management strategy for the ecosystem visited to protect your species.

Activity 4: Eco-Role Playing

Teacher Information:

The Teacher pretends to be an amusement park developer who wants to buy the ecosystem that the students just explored. The class role-plays the people who live near by what to do with the land. This is a chance for the students to show what they learned, to express their feelings about the place and to rehearse the kinds of decisions they would make as adults.

Have some of the children role-play creatures and plants from the ecosystem visited. How would a bird, amphibian, flower, tree, earthworm, beetle, moose, bear feel about losing their home?

