

Looking to the Future



Introduction:

It is valuable for students to think about what is possible, probable, and preferable in their future lives. This set of activities is a way to encourage futuristic thinking and to determine whether students' thinking has changed as a result of what has been studied in class. With the world population at over 7 billion and expected to grow to 9-10 billion by 2050, one cannot ignore the far-reaching impact of our numbers on virtually every aspect of life on Earth.

Materials:

Student Worksheet
Paper
Pen/pencil
Video camera (optional)

Procedure

Part 1: My Hopes for the Future

During the first month of the school year, or at the beginning of an ecology unit, ask students to write 5 things they want for themselves 20 years from now and five things they want for the larger society in 20 years. Collect their responses and tally the class's results. What were the most popular responses? Were there any common themes amongst the given answers? What are any obstacles to these hopes becoming reality in 20 years?

Part 2: News and Views

Students can only make educated guesses about what might happen in the future if they are aware of what is happening in the present. This activity encourages students to regularly read news publications, to make connections between articles and topics covered in class, and to use their imaginations to visualize the challenges and possibilities of the future.

1. Have students collect 3-4 news articles and opinion pieces on human population trends and related environmental and social issues. You may assign students a few specific subjects or have all students looking for all subjects. Subjects may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Concept:

Human behavior today will affect the quality of life in the future; human population growth is a factor that can have far reaching implications on the environment and society.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify personal goals to be achieved in 20 years.
- Discuss potential impacts of current population trends on their future lives.
- Research and summarize news articles about population and environmental trends.

Subjects:

Economics, Family and Consumer Sciences, Health, Science, Social Studies

Skills:

Summarizing articles, creative writing, visualization

Method:

In creating a futuristic news telecast and a letter to a friend 40 years from now, students think about what their futures might look like, given current realities, hopes, and dreams.



Air pollution	Deforestation	Energy
Land use	Public health	Waste management
Climate change	Economics	Food resources/Hunger
Migration/Immigration	Resource use/Consumption	Water resources
Community action/Involvement	Endangered species	Housing and homelessness
Population growth	Social security	

2. Students should write a one- or two-sentence summary of each article they bring in and submit it along with the article. Have students assemble a weekly “news briefs” bulletin board and/or a monthly newsletter summarizing current population and environmental news.
3. Then, divide students into small groups to prepare a news telecast that includes news stories from the United States and around the world related to population and environmental trends. If possible, have students videotape their telecasts and air them to the class. Discuss why they chose their particular visions of the future and how they envision over 7 billion people affecting our current way of life, and what sort of things may change as the population continues to increase. You may decide to assign the same topics to multiple groups in order to illustrate different possibilities and visions.

Part 3: Dear Friend

This creative writing exercise invites students to consider how continuing human population growth could affect their own lives in the future.

Duplicate the Student Worksheet and distribute it to students. You may wish to suggest the length of their letters.



Name: _____

Date: _____

Dear Friend Student Worksheet

Demographers project that our world population of over seven billion will grow to be 9-10 billion by 2050. Think about what this means for your own life. How might your life change with that many people in the world?

Write a letter, dated 40 years from today, to an old friend you haven't seen in many years, perhaps someone you are friendly with now. Talk about what is happening in your life and reflect on how things have changed in 40 years. What is better in your life? What is worse?

Some possible things to consider: Think about your neighborhood and places you like to go. How have they changed? How do people get around? What kind of work and activities do you do? Do you live near your friends and family members? What are you most happy about? What are you most afraid of?