

Being an Environmentally Aware Role Model



Students learn firsthand about ecology by designing, planting, and tending a garden at their school. Photo by Shannon Sweny-Stephens.

Pam Stephens

According to Ernest's Boyer's human commonalities, we are all connected to the ecology of the planet. As a student-teacher or someone contemplating student-teaching in the future, how does this commonality apply to you?

Ecology, as it relates to the earth, deals with relationships between living things and their environment. The study of ecology in correlation to your student-teaching is profound. It is through you that k-12 students can examine the effects that human beings have upon the environment.

You might be thinking at this point, "Shouldn't that be the science teacher's job?" Certainly! But it is

your job as well. Student-teachers are often close in age to the students in their classrooms. Because of this, student-teachers can easily act as role models that younger students will readily emulate.

Art and the Environment

Artists have long been concerned with the ecology of the planet. Introduce students to artists such as Thomas Cole, who painted *The Hunter's Return*. Look closely at the landscape for evidence of human intervention that impacts the environment.

Some artists of the twentieth century, such as Friedensreich Hundertwasser, chose to be proactive with their artwork. Many of Hundertwasser's drawings, paintings, and prints express ideas about environmental issues. He went one step further to refurbish derelict buildings with reclaimed materials and to add landscaping to the tops and sides of buildings.

In the twenty-first century, artists continue to make us aware of the impact we have on our planet and ways that we can make a positive difference. *Gomi*, a Japanese word for "rubbish," is the art form of re-using discarded articles such as cardboard to create useable and aesthetically pleasing objects. The point of Gomi is not to recycle, but to reclaim.

Production

After exploring these or other artworks, have students:


- create electronic slideshows, digital movies, or podcasts about ecological issues.
- use materials that would otherwise be thrown away to make a functional and aesthetically pleasing item.
- design a garden.

- pinpoint ecological problems in the neighborhood, take digital photographs, and create artistic solutions for those problems.

What Else?

With your students, create a list of the ways you can all make a positive difference for the environment. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

1. Use both sides of all papers when possible. Never throw away paper; always recycle it.
2. Collect construction paper scraps in a box. Make handmade paper from the scraps.
3. Melt old crayons together. After cooling, voilà! A block of mixed colors.
4. Separate recyclable materials from non-recyclable materials in the school cafeteria, classrooms, and offices. Sell recyclables such as aluminum to reclamation centers. Use the money to buy climate-friendly plants for your garden.
5. Recycle ink cartridges from printers. Several companies offer cash back for recycling cartridges. Use the money to purchase trees for your campus or plants for classrooms.

Do you have ideas for connecting your classroom or students to the ecology of the planet? Share your ideas by e-mailing Pamela.Stephens@nau.edu. 

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WEB LINKS

www.cartermuseum.org

www.kunsthawswien.com/english/hwh.htm

www.gomistyle.com