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Watch Where You Step

Students identify the components of an ecological footprint by creating a web diagram of all the resources they use in their everyday lives and the mark or “footprint” this consumption leaves on the environment. The activity emphasizes the interconnectedness of lifestyle, population, and environmental impacts, and focuses on solutions to reduce ecological footprints. Extension activities ask students to research past trends in ecological footprint size and to compare footprints from around the world.
Key Concepts

- Ecological footprint
- Population
- Consumption
- Sustainability

Integrated Subject Areas

- Science (Biology, Environmental)

Inquiry/Critical Thinking Questions

- What are the environmental, economic, and social impacts of a typical American diet and lifestyle?
- What would be the consequences if the rest of the world adopted a typical American lifestyle?
- What can we do to reduce negative social, environmental, and economic impacts associated with resource consumption?

Objectives

Students will:

- Identify the resources, processes, and impacts associated with everyday activities
- Describe the interconnectedness of population, lifestyle, economics, and environmental issues
- Discuss, create, and implement ways to reduce ecological footprints

NCSS Standards and Performance Expectations for High School Addressed

- II.f. apply ideas, theories, and modes of historical inquiry to analyze historical and contemporary developments, and to inform and evaluate actions concerning public policy issues
- III.e. describe, differentiate, and explain the relationships among various regional and global patterns of geographic phenomena such as landforms, soils, climate, vegetation, natural resources, and population
- III.h. examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions, such as land use, settlement pattern and cultural transmission of customs and ideas, and ecosystem changes
- III.k. propose, compare, and evaluate alternative policies for the use of land and other resources in communities, regions, nations, and the world
- VII.j. apply knowledge of production, distribution, and consumption in the analysis of a public issue such as the allocation of health care or the consumption of energy, and devise an economic plan for accom-
Students define and discuss sustainability and its 3 key components: the economy, the environment, and society. They evaluate 2 seemingly identical apples through the lens of sustainability. Students then brainstorm and analyze the sustainability of a variety of actions taken by individuals, businesses, and governments, using a Venn diagram to help organize the process. A homework assignment calls for students to evaluate the sustainability of resources they use on a daily basis.
IS IT SUSTAINABLE?

Environment:
- Does the activity/item use a minimal amount of resources? Are the resources renewable?
- Can the activity be done without damaging plants or animals?
- Does it contribute to air, water, and soil quality, rather than leading to pollution or erosion?
- Does it use resources at a rate that allows the resource to be renewed or regenerated?
- Is the waste created by the activity recycled or recyclable?
- Does the activity generate a limited amount of waste?
- Does this activity contribute to the conservation of natural resources?

Society:
- Does the activity/item contribute to people’s quality of life?
- Does it positively affect culture(s)?
- Are individuals and communities involved in making decisions about the activity, and is the decision-making process fair and democratic?
- Is it an equitable activity (i.e., does it offer more options and opportunities to certain groups of people than others)?

Economy:
- Does the activity/item have a positive impact on either local or global economies?
- Does it create meaningful and satisfying work for individuals?
- Does it contribute to a community’s economic development?
- Do all people receive equal economic benefits from the activity, rather than some people benefiting at the expense of others?

Overall Sustainability:
- Can the activity be done without causing damage in the 3 areas (economy, environment, and society)?
- Can this activity be done so that people in the future will have the same opportunities to do this activity as people today?

5. Arrange students in groups of 3 and assign each group 1 category: individual activities, business products and services, or government actions.

6. Have them create a brainstorm list of activities/items that fall within their assigned category. Be as specific and descriptive as possible during the brainstorm. For example, rather than list a cup of coffee, think about what kind of
• III.j. analyze and evaluate social and economic effects of environmental changes and crises resulting from phenomena such as floods, storms, and drought
• VI.a. examine persistent issues involving the rights, roles, and status of the individual in relation to the general welfare
• VII.f. compare how values and beliefs influence economic decisions in different societies
• VIII.b. make judgments about how science and technology have transformed the physical world and human society and our understanding of time, space, place, and human-environment interactions
• IX.c. analyze and evaluate the effects of changing technologies on the global community
• IX.d. analyze the causes, consequences, and possible solutions to persistent, contemporary, and emerging global issues, such as health, security, resource allocations, economic development, and environmental quality
• IX.h. illustrate how individual behaviors and decisions connect with global systems

Materials/Preparation
• Handout: Global Mall Dollars, 1 card per student (there are 6 cards per sheet)
• Handout: Global Mall Items, 1 sheet per student
• (Optional) Teacher master: Global Mall Impacts, 1 copy as teacher reference
• Handout: Choices and Impacts, 1 per group
• Make enough copies of the Global Mall Dollars sheets so that there is 1 card for each student. (Each sheet has 3 $200 cards, 2 $1500 cards, and 1 $5000 card to reflect income distribution around the world. Therefore, more students will end up with $200 cards and $1500 cards than $5000 cards.) Cut the sheets along the dotted lines and fold each card so the amount is not visible.

Activity
Introduction

1. Have the class brainstorm human needs (shelter, food, water, energy, etc.).
2. Tell students that today they will have a chance to shop for some of their needs at the “Global Mall.” The Global Mall sells resources that humans depend on to live, as well as some “nonessential” items.