

Creating Change

**Real World Ecosystems
Backgrounder
Grade Level: 5-8**



Environmental action can mean many different things. It may mean that you help recycle at school or at home. Or it can mean that you donate money to an organization that supports environmental causes. Often, when we think of the **environment** we think of environmental issues in places such as the rainforest or the Rocky Mountains, but one should remember that there are many interesting and related issues right in the schoolyard. There are many things you can do to help out.

Sometimes it is difficult to know where to start. At first, it may seem that there are either too many issues or not enough. One could start off by asking a question. For example, why is there no recycling program at our school? Why does the vacant lot have so much garbage in it? Why are there no trees in our schoolyard?

A second possible question is, "What could be done?" How can recycling be started in our school? Could the vacant lot be cleaned up and made greener? Can trees be planted in the schoolyard? A third step is to carry out the action. This step, depending on the activity, might take minutes or years. There are schools that have participated in school naturalization and it took them about three years to complete their project. Recycling your paper can take seconds.

Green Thumb: The One-minute Advocate!

The one-minute advocate! What can you do in one minute? Lots! Here are a few things you can do:

- Turn it off (lights, computers, the TV)
- Recycle your papers
- Bring a garbage-free lunch
- Don't litter; carry it to the garbage

Here are some examples of what schools have done to "green things up." As you will see from the projects that follow, these schools chose to do very different activities.

Plant trees!

In Alberta we have a lot of flat land. Trees are the perfect solution to making our communities beautiful, sheltering us from the cold winter winds and cleaning the air. Learners in Red Deer, Alberta, planted a row of trees in front of their school. A total of 12 trees, each about seven feet high, now create a green area in front of their school. The goal is eventually to make an outdoor classroom.

Book sale for endangered species!

Learners at another Alberta school dug deep into story trunks at home and brought their unread books to school. The books were to be sold to raise funds for endangered animals. A letter was sent home with all the learners, asking guardians to donate used books, stating the time of the book sale, as well as the cost of the books. The sale was advertised in the school newsletter and in the daily news bulletin. Teachers signed up for a time to take their learners to the book sale for 15 minutes. The Books for Endangered Species project was a successful event and raised money.

Did You Know?

Did you know that polar fleece may be made from bottles? It is true! Pop bottles are collected, cleaned and formed into pellets which are then made into fleece fabric. T-shirts and carpets may also be made into these pop bottle pellets.

Don't forget about cyberspace.

A junior high school posted its environmental camera "The Future Looks Right" web page. They used a digital camera to capture activities text. Learners posted instructions for many different types of activities such as recycle and Tetra packs, vermicomposting, and gardening.

Making things grow!

An unsightly patch of forest drew the attention of learners. They asked why there was so much garbage, and why the plants were not growing. The learners decided to adopt the area and clean it up. They consulted experts who told them that the area needed to be thinner grass and the bushes were interfering with healthy tree life. Learners picked up the garbage and thinned out the area and made space for other types of plants to grow. Now, the region is very green! Learners are proud because they made a difference.

Turn it off!

Many schools have developed different activities to encourage learners to turn off lights and computers. One school designated some learners as "Power Rangers." These learners would patrol the halls at lunch and after school, checking to see if electrical switches were turned off. Another school had a mascot that would be awarded to the classroom with the best "lights off" participation. A light bulb symbol on the class door would mean that those learners had achieved a high rating in turning their lights off and were thus awarded a bulb. Once the class accumulated five light bulbs, it won a prize.

Recycle it!

Recycling is a popular activity to help save the environment. Schools have often led the community into recycling. In one school, a classroom with a golden garbage can meant that the class achieved a

high standard of recycling. Recycling of paper and returnables is often led by learners. Monies collected by returning pop cans and bottles have allowed learners to purchase more recycling bins, to adopt species or spaces.

Think About...

- Describe a local issue.
- Think about the possible consequences of both action and inaction.
- Gather information.
- Identify possible actions and consequences.
- Organize an action and maintenance plan.