

Eco-Ethics

Introduction:

This activity is designed to give students the opportunity to examine their own values and beliefs as they relate to the environment, population and social issues, while gaining an understanding of the complex issues in many of today's environmental debates. It is not the intent of this activity to prescribe "right" and "wrong" answers for the students. In some cases, students may perceive what would be the most ethical solution to a given problem, while admitting that they realistically might not choose that option. On each Dilemma Card, the action choices are preceded by "would you" rather than "should you." This will encourage students to offer what they probably would do in each given situation. It might be useful to compare students' reactions to each dilemma both before and after going through the student readings and lessons.

Materials:

Copies of Dilemma Cards (provided)

Procedure:

1. Copy and cut the Dilemma Cards so that there are enough cards for each student to get one.
2. Divide the class into groups of four, and give each student a Dilemma Card.
3. Have students draw cards, study the situations, decide what he/she would do, and formulate his/her reason.
4. When the student is ready — typically in less than two minutes — he/she reads the situation and the options aloud to the rest of the group. The student gives the decision he/she has chosen, and briefly describes the reasoning involved. In turn, each of the other members of the group is invited to comment on the dilemma, and what he/she would do in the situation. The discussion of each dilemma by the members of the group should take about five minutes. The person whose dilemma is being discussed should have the opportunity to ask questions of the other members of the group, and to offer clarification about his/her decision. The discussion gives the students experience in having ideas examined by peers and is intended to remind the students of the need to take personal responsibility for decision making. It is not necessary and may not be desirable for the students to reach consensus; there are legitimately diverse views of the most appropriate and responsible actions to take in many situations. The purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to examine, express, clarify and take responsibility for their own reasoning.

ACTIVITY 21

Concepts:

Lessons on population, environment and society apply to daily personal decision making.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- ▶ Take positions on dilemmas.
- ▶ Formulate and present reasons for their positions.
- ▶ Discuss the dilemmas and positions in groups.

Subjects:

Science, Social Studies, Language Arts

Skills:

Decision making, critical thinking, writing, values clarification

Method:

While considering various dilemmas, students examine their own values and beliefs related to environmental issues, and evaluate possible actions they might take that have an impact on the environment.



5. Continue this process until each student has had the opportunity to express his/her decision and rationale about a dilemma.

Tips for Adaptations:

1. Have students write their own Dilemma Cards, incorporating local issues and debates.
2. Cut off the suggested options on the Dilemma Cards and have students create their own responses.

Follow-up Activity:

Have each student choose a dilemma and write a short paragraph on the positive and negative effects of all the options listed for that dilemma. Students should indicate what additional information, if any, is needed to make a responsible and informed decision. Students should identify what seems, in their judgment, to be the most responsible decision — and explain their reasoning.

Based on the activity, "Ethic-Reasoning," appears in *Project WILD's Secondary Activity Guide*, Western Regional Environmental Council, © 1983, 1985, 1987.



Here's Your Dilemma:

You are having a picnic with your family, and you see another family leaving to go home without having picked up their trash. It is clear the other family is going to leave litter all around. What would you do and why?

Would you:

- move quickly and ask them to pick up the trash before they leave?
- wait for them to leave and pick up the trash for them?
- do nothing?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

Your friend has just given you a lovely ivory necklace that she purchased on a trip to Africa. You are aware that African elephants are being slaughtered for their ivory tusks and are now an endangered species. What would you do and why? Would you:

- accept the necklace and wear it often?
- accept the necklace but keep it in a drawer?
- explain to your friend why you do not wish to accept her gift?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

Your school cafeteria prepares food items that are popular with students (burgers, hot dogs, pepperoni pizza, fried chicken, etc.). You know that most of these items are high on the food chain, requiring lots of water and energy to produce. You are also aware that much of the grain produced in this country is used to feed livestock, while much of the world suffers from hunger and malnutrition. You also know that most of the students are more familiar with meat dishes than vegetarian meals. Would you:

- visit with school administrators to suggest having meatless lunches served at least once a week to save money and to force students to break their meat habits at least one day a week?
- bring your own lunch and not worry about the cafeteria menu?
- eat whatever is served?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

Your parents make you mow and water your lawn. The area hasn't had much rainfall for some time and area officials are recommending that everyone conserve water. However, your neighborhood has strict rules about keeping each yard in order. Without regular watering your lawn will turn brown. What would you do and why? Would you:

- ignore the conservation warning and continue watering your lawn to keep it looking nice.
- sacrifice the beauty of your lawn by watering less often?
- plant different things in your yard that do not require so much care?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

You work at a restaurant and notice that each day meals are leftover and thrown away. You know that many people in your city are homeless and don't eat well. What would you do and why? Would you:

- suggest to management that leftover food be donated to a local homeless shelter?
- suggest to management that less food be prepared each day?
- do nothing?
- collect the food when the manager is not watching and give it to a homeless person down the street?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

You were in the hall late one day and saw the janitor dump the recycling bin and the regular trash into the same dumpster. Would you:

- figure he's had a long day and let it go?
- take the time to explain to him how the bins were set up and why?
- mention it to a teacher or person in administration?
- not bother to separate your trash in the classroom anymore?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

A friend asks you a question about sex and how to prevent pregnancy. Although you don't know the answer for sure, you know enough to guess. What would you do and why? Would you:

- make up an answer based on the facts you know?
- try to help find the answer in your health book or in a library?
- suggest your friend talk to his/her parents or a teacher?
- admit to your friend that you do not know for sure?
- suggest talking to a sibling?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

The school you attend is not in walking distance from your home. Your parents have given you the option of catching the bus on the corner or getting a ride from one of them in the family car. The car would get you to school faster and without waiting outside. But the bus uses less gas per passenger. Would you:

- take the bus?
- get a ride in the car?
- carpool with other kids nearby?
- ride your bicycle?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

There is an undeveloped green space in your town where you and your friends sometimes go for peace and quiet. It's home to some local wildlife and a small creek. The town officials are thinking about selling the land to a developer who wants to build a shopping mall. The mall would provide some jobs at the shops and restaurants, especially for area teenagers. The mall might also be a place for you and your friends to hang out. What would you do and why? Would you:

- support the mall project at the expense of your green area?
- oppose the mall project altogether?
- go to a city planning meeting to see if developers would consider another site?
- do nothing and let the adults decide?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

As your class is going to lunch, you notice that the TV, VCR and lights are still on. What do you do and why? Would you:

- turn off everything yourself?
- point it out to the teacher or principal?
- start a class discussion about saving energy?
- do nothing?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

After months of pleading, you were given a pet iguana for your birthday. Along with the pet came a book discussing how to best take care of your pet. Until then, you and your parents were not aware that reptiles can live 25 or more years in captivity. Several months have passed and you are tired of feeding, watering and cleaning up after your new pet. What would you do and why? Would you:

- flush the iguana down the toilet?
- let the pet go outside knowing that it is an exotic species for your area?
- beg a friend to take your iguana without telling them about the long life of the pet?
- secretly drop the pet off on the door step of a local veterinarian?
- other? (specify)

Here's Your Dilemma:

You love children and would like to have a large family. You are aware, however, that the world's population is expected to double in the coming century. You are also aware of the financial and environmental cost of a large family. What would you do and why? Would you:

- plan to have a large family anyway?
- decide not to have children?
- limit yourself to one or two children?
- get involved with youth groups, scouts, tutoring, teaching or emergency foster care, to still be around groups of youngsters?
- other? (specify)