



Healthy Schools – Healthy Environments

Sustainability: A view for Kids

What is Sustainability?

Sustainable means to keep something going forever. Sustainability refers to ensuring that planet EARTH and all of its resources can continue to provide a home for humans and all other species (animals and plants) forever.

Since our grandparents were born, humans recognize that we have created some problems on Earth. These include loss of animal's homes, air and water pollution, decreasing resources, climate changes and many other factors affecting our environment and living communities. When we find "sustainable" solutions to problems it means we find solutions that work well now and for the long term.

Thinking about Sustainability

When you think about sustainability, it is helpful to think about where the products and services that you buy or use come from, where the waste goes, and what impact your consumption of products and services has on other humans and other species.

Resources

As you think about a product, ask yourself about the resources needed to manufacture the item. Are the materials from resources that are renewable or non-renewable? Renewable resources are those that can be naturally regenerated as fast or faster than they will be depleted (used up). Also, energy resources are needed to make and deliver the product and services? Energy also comes from renewable and nonrenewable sources.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

Consider the following resources, and circle those that are renewable. An answer key is on the back.

1. FISH
2. FORESTS
3. FOSSIL FUELS
4. COAL
5. WIND ENERGY
6. CARROTS
7. DIAMONDS
8. ICE CAPS
9. SOLAR ENERGY
10. NATURAL GAS

Waste

When you use products or services, think about the waste produced. What can be recycled? What can be reused? Not all waste can be recycled or reused, (such as air pollution). The best way to address waste is to make choices that don't produce any (or as much) waste. Another issue is where the product will go at the end of its useful life. Does the item get thrown away, reused or can it be recycled?

Impact

Do you know where the products you use come from? Amazingly, our product choices can impact people and/or animals in far away places. Maybe the factory that made our shoes pollutes the water. Maybe a forest was destroyed in order to grow our chocolate. These examples give us reasons to think about where our products come from. More and more, businesses are considering sustainable practices for manufacturing products, such as using recycled resources in their products or using less packaging. It helps to buy local products and products produced using sustainable practices, when possible.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

Choose the more sustainable choice in each of these 10 situations, and circle it. Then look at the key to see how much you know already about sustainability.

1. When I bring my lunch, I bring:
 - a. a homemade sandwich
 - b. a prepackaged lunch meal.
2. When I head to soccer practice, I take:
 - a. bottled water.
 - b. a reusable water bottle.
3. I live close to school, I:
 - a. Walk or ride my bike.
 - b. Get my parent to drive me.
4. I need to buy school supplies, I:
 - a. buy whatever paper looks the best to me.
 - b. buy the post-consumer recycled paper.
5. My mom says we are out of milk, I:
 - a. suggest that we walk the half mile to the store to get some.
 - b. stay home and watch TV, she'll drive over to get some.
6. We stopped at the farmer's market last Sunday, I:
 - a. couldn't wait to leave so we could go to the store and buy some mangos.
 - b. was thrilled to find some local apples.
7. We went crabbing last summer and:
 - a. kept all the crabs we could get, then tried to eat them all, but had to throw some out.
 - b. kept enough crabs for our family, and left the rest to grow up and reproduce.
8. I will be starting a garden in my yard this year, I plan to:
 - a. spray herbicide to keep weeds down.
 - b. pull the weeds by hand.
9. When I get old enough to buy my own car, I want to get:
 - a. the biggest, fastest car I can afford.
 - b. a hybrid or other fuel efficient vehicle.
10. To maintain forests as a renewable resource:
 - a. all the trees can be cut because they will grow back.
 - b. only a portion of the trees should be cut so as to leave the environment for animal homes.

Answers to Renewable Resources: 5, 6 & 9 are renewable. Number 1, Fish are renewable if not over harvested; Number 2, Forests are renewable when managed in a way that protects habitat, soil and watersheds. Nonrenewable resources are: 3, 4, 7, 8, and 10 as they can not be regenerated faster than they are being depleted.

Answers to Sustainability Quiz: 1. a (Less waste), 2. b (Less waste), and the bottled water requires transportation from factory to store, producing greenhouse gases as an added impact; 3. a (Option b most likely requires the use of a fossil fuel, which is nonrenewable, and produces greenhouse gases). 4. b (The recycled choice is more sustainable). 5. a (Driving will require fossil fuel and produces greenhouse gases. Plus, walking is good exercise). 6. b (Local produce requires less transportation, and the farmer might receive more money for apples than wholesale. This keeps the farmer in business). 7. b Shellfish and fish from our oceans are renewable if harvested on a small scale that allows the populations to continue to produce). 8. b (Some fertilizers or herbicides might seem harmless, but they can damage soil quality and the eco-system of the soil. Damaged soil can affect the food chain for the animals that live in the garden's habitat). 9. b (Hybrid vehicles burn less fossil fuel and generate lower emissions than conventional cars. Alternative fuel vehicles are also good sustainable alternatives). 10. b (While it is true that a clear-cut forest can be replanted it will not reach the same maturity as a naturally occurring old-growth forest. And, for the animals that live in these forests, the loss of their homes is immediate and can impact their ability to find food and reproduce.)
