

# WITH EYES TO SEE



## PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: EARTH CHARTER III

ideas for  
teachers  
who want  
to  
integrate  
social  
justice  
concepts  
into what  
and how  
they teach

February  
2003

A mosquito bite is quite itchy and annoying, and emerging from a weekend camping trip with several bites can consume a poor soul for days. Most people don't like mosquitoes, but recognizing their important place in our environment as food and pollinators, we mostly settle on self-inflicted insect repellent and long sleeves for relief, leaving the widespread spraying of chemicals for mosquito control mostly to the past. In this country, we have little more to fear from this pesky bug than a swollen bump that itches, unlike the malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, and other life threatening illnesses they spread in other regions. Enter the West Nile Virus over the past few years, and our fears of mosquitoes are no longer relegated to trips to Central America. In cities like Chicago, one of the most affected in the country, tank trucks shrouded in hazy poisons could be seen crisscrossing neighborhoods in an attempt to kill the culprit.

The verdict is yet to be reached on the effectiveness of spraying for mosquito control, or the level of public health risk caused by the West Nile Virus and the attention it should receive (as of August 28, 2002, there were 480 reported cases of West Nile across 10 States, with 24 deaths; compare that to 40,000 new HIV infections, and more than 20,000 firearm related deaths each year in this country), and, there is little discourse on the negative effects of the sprays that land on homes, ponds, gardens, and woods to kill mosquitoes. The insecticides kill not only their intended target (to a certain extent), but also many other insects, micro-organisms, and animals (some of which, incidentally, naturally feed on mosquitoes). What are the long term effects of this disruption of the natural web of life? Do the consequences of the punishment match the crime?

Insecticides are not unique to mosquitoes of course, as spraying is a mainstay in most farms in this country. Public discourse on the use of chemicals in farming has increased in recent years as witnessed by the growing demand for organically grown and produced foods. One sector that is part of this debate on a global scale is coffee production.

Despite the increasing popularity of shade-grown, organic coffee (served predominantly at gourmet coffee shops), the majority of our cups in this country are filled with coffee grown by large industrial farms on open-fields, using harmful chemicals and destroying the plants and animals that once inhabited the cleared land. This coffee hurts the environment, while most shade grown coffee helps keep the forest and its inhabitants intact. In addition, more and more people are buying "fair-trade" coffee to support both environmentally friendly farming, as well as to provide a decent wage to the family farmers and cooperatives who are facing the lowest price for their product in years (which has had a horribly devastating impact on farmers throughout the world).

This third edition of *With Eyes to See* this school year focuses once again on the **Earth Charter**, and specifically on the Charter's second principle, **ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY**. You will find activities that can be used in the classroom aimed at promoting a healthy environment, both locally and around the world, focusing on issues like those raised above. The environment offers students with many empowering, hands-on learning possibilities, and the Earth Charter's second principle can be a powerful guide.

(Mosquito reference inspired by Barbara Kingsolver's *Small Wonder: Essays*. 2002)

CONCERN AMERICA

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# IDEAS

"If we do not speak for Earth, who will? If we are not committed to our own survival, who will be?"  
-Carl Sagan  
*Cosmos*

"A sustainable society is one that satisfies its needs without jeopardizing the prospects of future generations."  
-Lester Brown,  
*Worldwatch Institute*

The four principles of the **Earth Charter's** section two, **Ecological Integrity**, guide the activities found here, and can be summarized as follows:

5. *Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems;*
6. *Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection;*
7. *Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being;*
8. *Advance the study of ecological sustainability and the application of the knowledge acquired.*

K-12

## Serve with Cesar Chavez

Cesar Chavez is an American hero who gave his life to make life better for agricultural workers, the humanity of this country, and ultimately, for the environment. His efforts continue through the work of many people struggling for the health and wellbeing of those who pick our food, from labor rights and housing to the elimination of harmful chemicals used in farming. While each of us can follow in his footsteps on a daily basis through our own activism, big and small, one concrete way to celebrate his life is to participate in the **Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning on March 31, 2003**. Sponsored by the Cesar E. Chavez Foundation ([www.cesarchavezfoundation.org](http://www.cesarchavezfoundation.org), 213-362-0267) and the California Governors Office on Service and Volunteerism (*GO SERV*) ([www.goserv.ca.gov](http://www.goserv.ca.gov), 916-323-7646), the Cesar Chavez Day brings together Californians to participate in efforts to improve their communities (for ideas of projects and more information, contact the above sponsors). Students in other States can take up the call as well and extend the movement across the country, and/or participate in the National Youth Service Day, April 11-13 (visit [www.YSA.org/nysd](http://www.YSA.org/nysd) for information and grant opportunities).

## Coffee and Kids?

What part does each of us play in this coffee crisis? What we buy determines to a large extent what the market provides us. More and more people are buying fair-trade, shade-grown, organic coffee, and as a result, companies are buying more and stores stocking more of it (by next year, for example, the Trader Joe's food stores will only sell fair-trade coffee); this means more farmers get a living wage for their labor, and the environment is protected from harmful chemicals, erosion, and loss of habitat.

While most children are not significant coffee consumers, they are part of institutions where coffee is consumed like schools, churches, and families. Students can investigate what type of coffee their school buys for the faculty, for example, and research and present alternatives which promote a healthy environment, all the while learning about school bureaucracy, economics, school budgets, purchasing, and activism.

(For more information about Fair-Trade coffee, try [www.fairtradecertified.org](http://www.fairtradecertified.org), and [www.equalex-change.com](http://www.equalex-change.com) for starters; a simple keyword search with "fair-trade coffee" yields many more possibilities.)

6-12

## What is Your Ecological Footprint?

How much land space does each of us need to support our lifestyles? Two community planners at the University of British Columbia developed an index to answer this question. By considering one's food intake, use of natural resources, and recycling habits, the size of one's "ecological footprint" is estimated in acres. The "fair Earthshare" amount is 5.5 acres per person, meaning that everyone in the world should require only that amount (or get that amount) to maintain a healthy planet, while the average student footprint in this country is approximately 10 acres. Have each student visit [www.esb.utexas.edu/dnrnm/WhatIs/ecofootprint.htm](http://www.esb.utexas.edu/dnrnm/WhatIs/ecofootprint.htm) and fill out the online form (5 minutes) to calculate the size of their own footprint. They can change numbers in various fields (e.g. eat less beef, or recycle more) to see how the space they need changes. The exercise is a tangible way to look at each of our lives and how our consumption compares to each other, and to the world. In the United States, the average footprint per person is 30.18 acres, the world average is 7.04, and in India it is 2.62.

As more schools and organizations use the Earth Charter, companion guides and resources are being developed to accompany it. There will soon be a book entitled *The Earth Charter: A Study Manual of Reflection for Action*, for example. Contact the Earth Charter for information on this and other materials. The activities on this page were inspired by the Australian Earth Charter Project and the *Schools Manuals* they produced.

## Improving Lunch

K-12

As a hands-on way to consider the waste students and teachers create, hold a lunch party. Have the class dine together for lunch, and when finished, pile all of the waste together (it would help to separate pieces by putting food waste in one pile, paper in another, plastics in a third, etc.). Quantify the waste as possible (pounds, number of pieces, etc.). One activity can then be to brainstorm ways to reduce the waste (lunch boxes versus paper bags; home-made food versus pre-packaged "Lunchable" type meals; composting at the school/in the classroom, etc.). Another activity is to estimate the lunchtime waste produced at school over the entire year: multiply the waste amounts by the number of school days; multiply this by the number of students/teachers in the school. Come up with school-wide activities to reduce waste around lunch. Two relevant websites worth checking out: [www.wastefreelunches.org/schools.html](http://www.wastefreelunches.org/schools.html) (an effort by a school in California), and [www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/schools.html](http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/compost/schools.html) (for information on composting, ideas for schools, and related science activities).

"Garbage is not something you throw away. There is no such place as away. Disposal is a myth..."  
-Nancy Cosper

## Our Environmental Systems

8-12

Present the following statement by Diarmuid O Murchu to the class: "Our new understanding of the earth has been further enhanced by the emerging interdisciplinary study now known as 'General Systems Theory,' which views the world as an interconnected hierarchy of matter and energy. According to this view nothing can be understood on its own; everything is part of a system, including human beings who must learn that they, too, are integral parts of this complexity and that they live or die to the extent that each individual part of the whole lives or dies." (from *The God who Became Redundant*) What do the students think about this statement? What is the 'General Systems Theory'? Does this contradict/compliment other scientific theories they have studied? Another set of activities/questions will get students to look at environmental systems themselves: What systems make for healthy humans (and, consequently, healthy environments)? For example, how do we obtain clean water? Maintain clean air? Dispose of our waste? Industrial waste? Find examples of closed-cycle/zero waste management strategies. How close is the school to such strategies?

"Our society will be defined not only by what we create, but by what we refuse to destroy."  
-John C. Sawhill  
The Nature Conservancy

## Unlikely Environmental Allies

6-12

Hunters and environmentalists team up to protect a forest; farmers and a river conservation group join forces to improve farm run-off pollution; Mexicans and Americans struggle together for a clean border. Often, the most lasting and powerful environmental protection successes are a result of consensus by various sectors, many of which are seemingly unlikely allies. Take the coalition of native peoples, scientists, environmentalists, economists, and others working to confront the nuclear power industry's attempts to build a radioactive waste dump on lands considered sacred aboriginal territory for the five lower Colorado River Indian tribes. The land in question, the Ward Valley, is located in California's East Mojave Desert, only twenty miles from the Colorado river. The only obstacle now standing in the way of completely banning the project is Governor Gray Davis.

Are there any local environmental issues using consensus? State-wide? How is consensus being used at school to resolve problems and create a better environment? Is consensus always possible? Do the students use consensus in their lives? What is Consensus?

## RECOMMENDED

"This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life. He is merely a strand in it.

Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."  
-Chief Seattle  
1854

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. The September 2002 edition of the National Geographic magazine, among other stories, focuses on the world's fresh water, and has a report on the state of the planet. The map supplement is a great resource on the world's health.

2. When looking for a job in the nonprofit sector, [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) is a great resource. Building on their large database of organizations (3,300 environmental organizations alone), they have created links for teachers and students. Visit the site to learn about organizations started by kids, lesson plans, and links to organizations involved in environmental education.

3. *A Cafecito Story* is a bilingual story written by the well known novelist Julia Alvarez. The *Story* tells of a son of a Nebraska farmer, a teacher, who during a vacation at a luxury resort in the Caribbean, finds himself one day on a small, organic, family coffee farm, where he never leaves. Along the way, we learn about coffee production, coffee growers, sustainable models of development, and also the plight of family farms in this country. In real life, Julia Alvarez and her husband run a shade-grown, organic, fairly-traded coffee farm. The book is great for classrooms.

4. A good resource for the classroom is *Eco-Fun: Great Projects, Experiments & Games for a Greener Earth* by David Suzuki and Kathy Vanderlinden.

### CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guinea, and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in Orange County which include:

- \* The St. Nicholas Project
- \* Walk Out of Poverty
- \* Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- \* "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- \* School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- \* Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

**MARK YOUR CALENDERS!** Concern America's annual **Walk Out Of Poverty** takes place on April 12. **JOIN US!** Call Janine or Eli at Concern America to get information, walk packets, posters, flyers, and/or to schedule a presentation for your group. The Walk provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa.

**LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!** It is hoped that the *With Eyes to See* newsletters provide teachers with useful ideas for infusing peace and justice concepts into their curriculum. What is helpful to you? What would you like to see added? What would be more helpful to you? When you get a moment, we would appreciate hearing from you. Send a note to us at Concern America, P.O. Box 1790, Santa Ana, CA, 92702, or an email to [concamerinc@earthlink.net](mailto:concamerinc@earthlink.net).