

TANENBAUM

Religions in My Neighborhood

Teaching Curiosity
and Respect about
Religious Differences

Including: The Seven Principles for Inclusive Education



Religions in My Neighborhood

Teaching Curiosity and Respect about
Religious Differences



Imagine...a more peaceful world that respects difference.
We are committed to making that vision a reality.

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Chapter III (Unit 2): Beliefs about Caring for the Environment

BIG IDEAS FOR III (2)

- In addition to caring and sharing for people in the same community, many people also have common understandings about caring for the earth and the animals.
- Taking care of the earth and animals is called stewardship of the earth in some religious and non-religious traditions. Another word we can use is environmentalism.
- Ideas for supporting the environment can come from many sources, such as a specific religious tradition, or from drawing upon the beliefs of many Native American tribal nations and other indigenous peoples, or from scientific knowledge about what is needed to keep the earth and animals healthy and well-cared for.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR III (2)

- How do we learn to take care of the environment?
- What can we learn from the beliefs about the environment held by many Native American tribal nations and other indigenous peoples that can help us better understand how to protect our environment?
- What can we learn from science that can help us better understand how to protect our environment?
- What are some religious stories about caring for the environment?
- What are the consequences of neglecting our responsibilities to the environment?

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR III (2)

- English Language Arts: 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11
- Social Studies: 1, 3, 5, 8, 9

LESSON III (2): EXPLORING BELIEFS ABOUT CARING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Rationale: Why teach this lesson?

When students realize that caring for the earth is a value that has been communicated through centuries of traditions, they can learn that their relationship to environmentalism extends far beyond their teacher's lessons or their family's perspective. They can learn that environmentalism is more than a passing trend in the news. It is a deeply held belief, sometimes a sacred belief, about one's relationship, and the relationships of all peoples, to the earth and its resources.

Objectives for this lesson – Students will:

- Learn the values about caring for the environment espoused by many Native American beliefs.
- Consider the story of Noah's Ark from an environmental perspective.
- Compare the story of Noah's Ark to the native story of The Great Flood.
- Demonstrate their knowledge of harmful action and helpful actions for the environment.
- Work collaboratively in a proactive closure activity.

Materials needed:

- The story of Noah's Ark (either from the Book of Genesis or a modern version of your choosing)
- The Great Flood from *One State-Many Nations*⁴⁸

Time needed:

3 class meetings, 30–45 minutes each

Setting the lesson:

Explain to students that there are many Native American tribal beliefs about caring for the earth, and explain that these beliefs can help the students better understand how to care for the environment. Help students consider the concept of environmentalism and note that it is not a “new” concept. The notion of caring for the earth has been a tradition in many communities, in some cases for countless generations.

A good resource for educators to consult to learn more about some Native American traditions is the website *One State-Many Nations*, which includes lesson plans and videos.

Also, a book that is helpful to teachers is *Nature's Way: Native Wisdom for Living in Balance with the Earth* by Ed McGaa (2005). Ed McGaa's website is www.edmcgaa.com. He is a registered tribal member of the Oglala Sioux OST 15287 and was born on the Pine Ridge reservation. He received his Bachelor's degree from St. John's University and earned a law degree from the University of South Dakota. He has written several books on Native American topics and educators can use his work as a resource for their own understanding.

⁴⁸ *One State-Many Nations*, Native Americans of Ohio, sponsored by Public Broadcasting System and Northeastern Educational Television of Ohio, <http://westernreservepublicmedia.org/onestate/index.htm>

Procedure for the lesson:

Day 1:

Lead a group discussion that helps students learn about the connections among different systems of beliefs even though they may come from different sources, such as religious traditions or scientific investigation. Ask the students:

- What do we learn from various cultural traditions and storytelling about caring for the earth?
- What are some other ways that we learn about caring for the earth?
- Have we learned from science how to care for the earth?
- Do some people learn in their spiritual and religious communities to care for the earth?

After the discussion, read two different stories about floods and the earth's destruction and renewal:

Read the story of Noah's Ark. You can read the Noah's Ark story from the Book of Genesis or from one of the many children's books about Noah's Ark.

Read the story of The Great Flood. You can get the story of The Great Flood from *One State-Many Nations*.

Lead a discussion: What is the story of Noah's Ark teaching us? What is the story of The Great Flood teaching us?

Day 2:

After reading the stories and the prior discussion, lead this next activity to help students understand the interconnectedness of all people and the environment. Begin the activity in a discussion circle. Record students' responses on chart paper. Ask students to contribute ideas to a list of ways in which the earth is being damaged. Help students generate ideas and assist them in making connections to their responsibilities in everyday life (such as driving cars too much, or using too much paper, or using disposable plastic water bottles). These examples can come from their story reading in class, or from discussions of those readings, or their own knowledge. You might consider assigning individual students or groups of students to research organizations that are actively addressing the environment. They can identify different approaches used by these organizations for trying to improve the environment.

Day 3:

For the final activity, help students understand the interconnectedness of all people and the environment through the creation of a "circle web." Students form a large circle, facing the center. One student holds a large ball of twine, with one end firmly in hand. The student shouts one way in which the earth is being damaged (such as the examples listed on chart paper on Day 2). While shouting out this example, the student throws the twine ball across the room to another student, but holds onto the end of string. The student who catches the ball holds onto their section twine, shouts out another example of harm to the environment and throws the twine across the circle to another student.

This process continues until every student has held onto the new end of twine, then thrown the ball of twine across the circle while shouting out an example of harm to the environment. When this process is finished, all of the students will be holding an end of the twine, and the circle will be criss-crossed by a “web” of twine which represents the interconnected “web” of the many different ways in which we harm the environment.

Note: When working with younger students, you can record their answers on post-it notes and give each student one. As you give out each post-it, a student picks up the end of the twine from another student and walks to another point to form the circle.

At this point, the instructor and students can stand there, holding the ends of the web, and talk about how all of those examples had interconnected consequences. Now is the time to work on “reversing” this web of harm to the environment, with examples from their reading of stories in class, discussion of those stories, or personal knowledge.

Now it is possible to go around the circle, with each student saying some way that harm to the environment can be reversed. At that point, each student can drop the end of twine. This is repeated by every student in the circle, until everyone has said some way that the harm to the environment can be reversed – and all of the string is on a big heap on the floor. Encourage students to identify things that they can do (pick up plastic bottles and recycle them, etc.).

Closure:

Make a list on chart paper of students’ ideas of ways they can help reverse harm to the environment and to care for the environment, at home and at school. Some of the ideas in the reversal exercise should come up again, reinforcing the concept that everyone can contribute and act on this value.

Assessment for the lesson:

- Can students provide examples of their awareness of harmful actions and helpful actions for the environment?
- Do students demonstrate empathy for all living plants and animals on the earth?

Chapter III (2) Extensions for exploring beliefs about caring for the environment:

Visit the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences “Kids pages.”⁴⁹ There are a number of resources there for games and activities to teach how to “reduce, reuse, recycle.”

Visit the the teacher page of the Public Broadcasting Service⁵⁰ for a wide range of free classroom resources, including video and games online. The sections on social studies, science and the arts all include lessons about environmentalism. The website includes lessons for each developmental need listed as grade levels Pre-K, K–2, 3–5, 6–8 and 9–12.

Chapter III (2) Extensions for exploring science and learning about climate change:

Read aloud or form literature circles for students to read and learn from the following selections of children’s literature:

Under the Weather: Stories About Climate Change edited by Tony Bradman (2010). Ages 9–12.

A Hot Planet Needs Cool Kids: Understanding Climate Change and What You Can Do About It by Julie Hall (2007). Ages 9–12.

Chapter III (2) Extensions for exploring animals and nature:

Use the stories of the flood to examine the impact of the environment on animals. Identify different animals saved during the floods and compare their similarities and differences. Ask students to observe which animals are stronger and how they are weaker, their qualities and characteristics. Consider how their survival contributed to the broader community after the flood.

⁴⁹ National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/recycle.htm>

⁵⁰ Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), <http://www.pbs.org/teachers/>

