

Whole World in our Hands: Experiential Activities

Youth Participation

Building Bridges in Community

Themes:

Youth Participation, Climate Change and Renewable Energy

Prerequisite:

Students should be familiar with the debate surrounding renewable (solar, wind etc) and non-renewable energy (fossil fuels).

Curriculum Entry Points:

Grade 9 social studies, grade 11 resource education, grade 12 environmental sciences, grade 12 economics.

Overview:

This exercise will help youth develop debate and presentation skills that will help them participate more effectively in democratic processes. Using character cards to assist students in developing their position, the various stakeholder groups that traditionally participate in environmental issues debates will be explored, as will the idea of renewable energy and the democratic process.

Objectives:

- To build, maintain, and restore relationships.
- To develop positive approaches towards dealing with conflicts.
- To generate an informed opinion about an important environmental issue through role playing and debate.
- To create safe environments, both physically and emotionally.
- To understand that how differently “rights” may be perceived.
- To share what the class has learned through the publication of a mini newsletter featuring renewable energy and the importance of participation to make sure your voice is heard.
- Outline the benefits and trade-offs associated with nuclear, hydro and wind power with regards to water quality, human health and habitat loss.



Photo: Leland Daugherty

Main Concepts and Vocabulary :

SPIN DOCTOR: A person who works in public relations, usually for a political party, who rewords and reworks stories and events for the benefit of that party, organizations, business or individual.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: The act of arbitrating differences of belief or opinion about a given set of circumstances or ideas; the process of resolving a dispute.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: A person has a conflict of interest when the person is in a position of trust which requires her to exercise judgment on behalf of others (people, institutions, etc.) and also has interests or obligations of the sort that might interfere with the exercise of her judgment, and which the person is morally required to either avoid or openly acknowledge.

DEBATE: The formal presentation of, and opposition to, a state's proposition.

Classroom Activity: Role Playing Game

Energy and Community

Time required:

Two 60 minute periods

Materials:

Role Playing Cards

Background:

Although the development of renewable energies is becoming increasingly important as an alternative to non-renewable power sources, the development of renewables has been delayed for a number of reasons, including technical, social, political and financial interests. The purpose of this activity is not to determine the position of schools or students in respect to a given form of energy but more appropriately to initiate participation, increase communication and allow students to voice their feelings about the environment and social issues in the class.

Opening Questions:

Where does the energy in your house come from?

What do you know about renewable energy?

Activity Instructions:

1) Read the following scenario to the whole class:

Carlingwood County's energy consumption is continually rising. Unfortunately the power sources, including hydro and coal fired plants are unable to meet the demand. Several years ago a nuclear power plant was put out of service due to the high cost of its restoration and its low potential energy output. Facing new energy demands, the plant's rehabilitation is being considered once again. The issue has attracted the attention of many different individuals and interest groups in the County and a general meeting is called by area councilors to discuss new sources of energy.

2) Read the character cards to the whole class so that everyone is aware of the various groups' positions. Ask students to write down their name and the group or citizen they most identify with and why. Collect these sheets and store them for the next day.

3) Divide the class into eight groups with at least two students per group.

4) Distribute one of the character cards to each group.

5) Allow about half an hour for the group to select their representative and develop their position.

Day Two

6) Have each representative present their position to the class.

7) After listening to each presentation have the class review their opinions from the previous class.

Have they changed their minds? How does participation of different groups affect a debate? What if one of the groups was missing? Does the class believe any group that should have been present in this debate wasn't there? Are there any real life scenarios like this in New Brunswick/Canada/World?

Energy & Community Role Play Character Cards / 1

Mr Trueman

You are one of the founders of the nuclear power plant. Your whole life has been dedicated to worker safety and the use of nuclear energy. Due the rising demand for energy, there is a need to continue production using an outdated plant. This will require a great deal of labour and technical resources. You think that it is important for more people to have jobs and you know that the reconstruction will provide some.

Mrs Goldman

You have been through all this before and you are ready to fight again. You do not think that the nuclear power plant should be restored as you have seen what it can do to the land, air water and the birds and animals. You are also a strong supporter of clean sources of energy like wind power and solar energy.

Mr Bovin

You are a fisherman who has been experiencing increased catches and a reduced number of deformities in the fish since the nuclear power plant has been out of service. Your occupation would once again be threatened with the reopening of the plant.

Miss Reichle

You have been unemployed for a long time and you find it difficult to care for your two children. The reconstruction project would make it easier for you to find employment with the local contractors.

Councilor

You are the chairperson, the organiser of the meeting. You need to make sure that everyone gets a fair say. At the end of the meeting you hope that you will all come up with a decision or some ideas to try out. You are not really sure what you think about the factory. Your main job is to keep order during the meeting.

Energy & Community Role Play Character Cards / 2

Mass Media

Your job is to cover the debate over the rehabilitation project. Your journalists will be present at council, but also will do interviews with the participants. Not all finding will be transmitted to the public before it is assured that there is no conflict of interest. The coverage must pass the test such that your advertisers, including companies that own mining or reconstruction rights involved with the plant, remain confident in your network. It is equally important that your findings are presented as entertainment.

Government

Both the supporters and opponents of the rehabilitation project will be addressing their concerns to you. Professionalism and honesty must be shown in dealing with each party. Discretion is required when offerings appear to be controversial.

Alternative/community based Media

Although similar pressures are upon you to deliver the news and debate, you have a greater freedom to express the position of the multiple players. It is important for you to make provision for groups that do not have the same coverage in the mass media.

First Nations

The rehabilitation of the power plant will give you a whole slew of nightmares. Since the plant was constructed years ago, a high number of illnesses have appeared in your community. Some suggest that the contamination up the river is affecting your animal food stocks. As throughout all of North America, your people have never ceded the ancestral territory. The land claims have still not been resolved at the time, but legal efforts already take much of your energy. It will be necessary to work with others to have your position be heard.

_____ (*Create your own role & brainstorm your views*)

Community Activity

READ ALL ABOUT IT

Our Voice School Newsletter

Now that interest in renewable energy and community organizing has been piqued, give the class the task of learning more about specific examples of renewable energy, community energy and international energy issues (climate change, Denmark's wind energy movement etc.)

Each student should write a brief (200—300 words) article on a related subject. Have students compile these articles into a small magazine (Our voice 'zine) and produce enough copies to place in the library, cafeteria, front office and teacher's lounge. Announce the 'zine's publication during the daily announcements.

The *Our voice* 'zine could also be published online on the school website and distributed via email to interested community members.

Organize as Local Youth on Community Issues

- Brainstorm concerns you as a youth have about the community you live in. Create postcards with these concerns written onto the cards. Send your cards to your local MLA, or invite your local MLA to attend or speak at a school event.
- Organize a Youth Forum within your high school where youth can come together, voice and discuss issues that concern them, and create action plans to have their voices heard.
- What is democracy? Write your own oath of what democracy means to you. Is the province of New Brunswick truly democratic? Why or why not? How could it be changed in any way to make it a more democratic and just society for all? Write a letter to the editor of your local paper with your feelings of what democracy is, why it is important, and how New Brunswick can work towards a more democratic society.
- Organize a 'Celebration of New Brunswick: the voices of our people' evening. Be sure to invite people from your community of many different backgrounds i.e. Wabanaki, Acadian, English-speaking, recent immigrants, government officials, your neighbours, etc. Have these people tell, act, or present their background, their perspectives on belonging in New Brunswick, and how decisions in the Legislative Assembly affect them.

Resources

New Brunswick Environmental Network Youth Action Group: Get involved with other youth across the province who are interested in environmental issues. Contact nben@nben.nb.ca or youthactiongroup@yahoo.com

The Democracy Project www.thedemocracyproject.ca is a national non-partisan initiative to involve youth in the federal election through All Candidates Town Halls, on-line surveys, test voting and more.