

Humans vs. Nature: Can We Get Along?

Objective

The student will understand there are ongoing conflicts between how humans use the Earth's resources and what plants and animals need to survive. He or she will be able to discuss both the positive and negative consequences of one such conflict.

Materials

- index cards
- computer with Internet access
- newspapers, magazines
- pencils or pens

Action

1. About a week before beginning the activity, ask students to look through newspapers, magazines, or search online for events that involve conflict between how humans use the environment and the needs of plants or animals. For example, one such conflict might be when a government agency increases deer hunting limits in a certain area to help manage a deer population that is growing too fast. Other ideas are available on the recommended Web sites under Online Sources. (Conflicts do not necessarily need to be in your area.)
2. Ask students to clip or print the articles and bring them to class. Students must provide sources for their information and/or names of organizations that published the information. Ask them to review information from a few different sources and not rely on just one. Compare and contrast these sources to see how the viewpoints correspond. Does a source give a factual report, or is the source biased?
3. When you have collected 10 or more topics, review events with the class.
4. Divide the class into two groups and ask each group to choose ONE of the 10 events. Each group will then split into two teams, those for the "humans" and those for the environment or animals. Give students a few days to gather information and prepare their arguments. For each event, ask students to take the position of different people involved in the event such as lawmakers, environmentalists, land developers, city officials, farmers or ranchers, homeowners, community members, and others.
5. When ready, have each group stage a 10-minute debate. Students from both sides should state their views and allow time for rebuttal. The student group that isn't debating is the audience. After the debate, the audience can ask questions. After the two debates, discuss the topics as a class: Is there an easy solution to these conflicts? What knowledge, if any, do scientists contribute to understanding the conflict? How, if at all, did information from scientists differ from media reports? Do students think all sources are equally valid? How do economical or political agendas (generate income, provide jobs, improve economy) drive these conflicts? How does the media affect public opinion?



Online Sources

Conservation International
www.conservation.org

Polar Bears International
www.polarbearsinternational.org

The Izaak Walton League of America
www.iwla.org

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
www.nfwf.org

National Geographic Magazine Online: A River Dammed
www.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0104/feature1/index.html

National Wildlife Federation
www.nwf.org

The Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org

World Wildlife Fund
www.worldwildlife.org

The Conservation Fund
www.conservationfund.org

National Audubon Society
www.audubon.org

International Rhino Foundation
www.rhinos-irf.org

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
www.rmef.org

Deeper Depths

Students could present information they've gathered to other students in the school. They should emphasize the pros and cons involved in each decision: There isn't always an easy solution. Students can create displays for the school multimedia center or library that represent either or both sides of the conflict.