



# The Right to a Clean Environment

Lesson Plan:  
Right to a Clean  
Environment Role-Play

Grade Level: 3-5



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## Lesson Plan: Right to a Clean Environment Role-Play

**Goal:** To help students gain an understanding of how the environment is connected to their daily lives and human rights.

**Objectives:**

- Students will adopt the role of a character whose life is affected by the environment.
- Students will consider the ways in which the environment affects daily life.
- Students will learn about the right to a clean environment.

**Essential Question:** Why do people have the right to live in a clean environment?

**Time Frame:** 1-2 class periods

**Grade Level:** 3-5

**Materials:**

- A large piece of paper or poster board
- *Handout: Character Cards*

**Vocabulary:** asthma, environment, fertilize, hurricane, pollution, recycle, wildfire

**International Human Rights Standards Connection:**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

**Teacher Background:**

The right to a clean environment is the right to live in an environment that does not jeopardize a person's health, livelihood or well-being. This right is closely connected with the right to health and the right to an adequate standard of living. For more information about the right to a clean environment, visit The Advocates for Human Rights' "Right to a Clean Environment Toolkit" at:

[http://www.discoverhumanrights.org/right\\_to\\_a\\_clean\\_environment.html](http://www.discoverhumanrights.org/right_to_a_clean_environment.html).



## Lesson Plan: Right to a Clean Environment Role-Play

### Procedure:

- 1. Assign roles.** Photocopy *Handout: Character Cards* and cut up the character cards. (There are blank cards for teachers to add roles). Ask each student to pick a card. Tell students that their cards explain the characters they will play in the activity. Give the students a few minutes to read their cards and to think about the lives of their characters. Have students volunteer to read their character card out loud to the class. Ask them to picture their character's family, home, and environment. Ask them to think about their character's daily routines and how the environment affects their character's daily life.
- 2. Role-play.** Organize the students into a large circle. Read the following statements, and ask students to step into the circle if their character would agree with the statement. If students are uncertain, have them remain in place or make an educated guess. Go through one as an example before proceeding with the activity.
  - My life is affected by the environment I live in.
  - I live in a clean environment.
  - I live in an unclean environment.
  - In my daily life, I do things to try to help the environment.
  - I depend on the environment for food.
  - I do not have clean water to drink.
  - I do not have clean air to breathe.
  - Environmental problems affect the way the members of my family live.
  - My life would be better if my environment was cleaner.
  - I can take action to improve my environment.
  - I can take action to help improve the environment that other people live in.
- 3. Discuss.** Debrief the role-play by asking students the following questions:
  - Do you have anything in common with any of the characters?
  - Do you think there are people in your neighborhood or in your city whose lives are similar to your character's life? Why or why not?
  - Do you think there are other people in this country whose lives are similar to your character's life? Why or why not?
  - What responsibilities do we have to make sure that everyone can live in a healthy environment?
  - How can you make a difference for people who are similar to your character?



## Lesson Plan: Right to a Clean Environment Role-Play

4. **Define.** Ask students if any of them can think of a definition for the right to a clean environment. If they need help, write this definition on the board:

*The right to a clean environment is the human right to live in an environment that doesn't hurt your health or well-being. This includes clean air and clean water.*

5. **Take Action.** Ask students to write down a simple change or two they could make in their own lives to help take care of the environment. For example, they could make a personal commitment to recycling or start a recycling program at school; waste less water by taking shorter showers or not running the water when they brush their teeth; or unplug electronic chargers when not in use. Encourage students to be as specific as possible with their personal action plans.
6. **Pledge.** Ask students for suggestions of a change the class could make together to help take care of the environment. Write down a list of ideas on the board. Changes could be recycling paper, reusing scrap paper, or turning out the lights for an extended period of time when the class leaves the room. Once students have given their suggestions, vote as a class to choose a change from the list. On a large piece of paper, write out the class pledge to make this change together. Leave room at the bottom of the page so students can sign their names under the pledge. Once all of the students have signed, display the pledge in the classroom.

**\*Note:** For ideas on how to “green” your classroom and your curriculum, check out the “Right to a Clean Environment” edition of *Rights Sites News* available for free online here: [http://discoverhumanrights.org/uploads/rights\\_sites\\_-\\_clean\\_environment\\_-\\_final\\_2.pdf](http://discoverhumanrights.org/uploads/rights_sites_-_clean_environment_-_final_2.pdf).



## Handout: Character Cards

<p>I live in a desert. Water is expensive, so I must be careful not to drink too much, even though it is often very hot outside.</p>	<p>My family bikes more and drives less than we used to because we want to help keep our air clean.</p>	<p>I live in a city. I have asthma, and there are some days I can't go outside because the air is too dirty.</p>	<p>My family grows vegetables in our backyard. When there is enough rain and sun, we grow enough vegetables to last the whole summer.</p>
<p>I planted a tree in my backyard to help keep the air clean.</p>	<p>I live near a river. My family had to stop eating the fish we caught in the river because the dirty water in the river made the fish unsafe to eat.</p>	<p>My family uses cloth bags to carry home our groceries so that we don't waste paper or plastic bags.</p>	<p>I turn off the lights when I leave the room to help the environment by saving energy.</p>
<p>I live in a place that is very hot and dry. In the summer, we sometimes have to stay at my grandparents' house when there are wildfires in the forests near our house.</p>	<p>My family saves kitchen scraps and newspapers instead of throwing them away, and then we use them to fertilize our garden.</p>	<p>The water that comes out of the faucet at my house is brown. When my family wants water to drink, we have to buy bottled water.</p>	<p>I live near a factory. People in my neighborhood have trouble breathing, and we think it is because of pollution from the factory.</p>
<p>On Earth Day, my class picked up trash near our school to make our neighborhood cleaner.</p>	<p>I live on a farm. There hasn't been enough rain for the past few years, so my family has struggled to grow enough food to support our family and pay for our needs.</p>	<p>When a company wanted to cut down trees to build a building near my house, I wrote to the mayor of my city to ask her to protect our trees.</p>	<p>My class helped start a recycling program at our school so that our school would produce less trash.</p>



## Handout: Character Cards

<p>I grow potted plants inside my house to keep the air in our house cleaner.</p>	<p>The water that comes out of my faucet is not clean. I got an ear infection from taking a bath in my home.</p>	<p>Because my class wrote letters to our principal, now our school is cleaned using products that won't make us sick.</p>	<p>My neighbors get together in the spring to clean garbage off the streets after the snow melts.</p>
<p>I live in a neighborhood near a trash dump. My parents are worried that if I play near the trash, I might get sick.</p>	<p>I don't leave the water running when I brush my teeth because I want to save water.</p>	<p>My school uses chemicals to make the lawn green. Some of the chemicals they use could make me sick.</p>	<p>My teacher uses paper that is recycled from the school office for our spelling tests.</p>
<p>When I have outgrown my clothes my parents give them to my cousins and younger kids in the neighborhood.</p>	<p>Everyone in my family takes really long showers.</p>		