

# A Better Way To Teach Sustainability

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Teaching about sustainability and including sustainability activities in middle school and high school can impact current and future students.

An important part of any science curriculum that promotes student engagement is real-world connections. Finding ways for students to understand their new knowledge and apply it outside of our classrooms is incredibly meaningful. Teaching about sustainability is one option to get students to actively engage with a lesson and use their knowledge in the wider world.

I think we all know that there simply isn't enough being done to make our world sustainable, but highlighting what IS being done will help prevent despair for ourselves and our students! That's the goal of these sustainability activities in this post – to give students options to make change in our world!

## What is sustainability?

Sustainability is about meeting peoples' current needs without compromising what future generations might need for their survival.

You have likely heard the saying that we don't inherit the earth from our ancestors rather we borrow it from our children. This saying is at the heart of sustainability.

The best way to ensure that current needs don't compromise what future generations might need is to get the future generation involved now. By teaching about sustainability directly and incorporating sustainability activities in our classrooms and lessons, we can encourage generational change.



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## Teaching About Sustainability

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Incorporating sustainability principles into your classroom, school, and community can be approached in numerous ways.

On an individual level, there are various options to promote environmental friendliness. These include opting for eco-friendly transportation methods such as biking or carpooling, adopting a locally sourced or homegrown food approach, organizing community clean-up initiatives, or even volunteering with environmental advocacy groups (or initiating such groups within your school!).

Teaching about sustainability directly in your science class provides an excellent opportunity to educate students on this crucial topic. Whether it's integrating a sustainability unit into your middle school science course or dedicating an entire course to environmental science, there are numerous avenues to deliver these lessons effectively.

You can explore a wide range of options to engage students in sustainability-related topics. This may involve conducting hands-on experiments to explore ecological concepts, discussing real-world examples of environmental challenges and solutions, inviting guest speakers who specialize in sustainability, utilizing multimedia resources to showcase environmental issues, or engaging students in project-based learning activities centered around sustainable practices.

By incorporating sustainability education into your science curriculum, you not only equip students with knowledge and understanding but also foster a sense of environmental stewardship and empower them to make positive changes in their lives and communities.

This is the first in a series of posts on the topic of teaching about sustainability in your classroom.

Next up: **[A BETTER WAY TO TEACH SUSTAINABILITY: PART II](#)**

## **Using Fiction and Pop Culture**

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Some of the best options to teach about sustainability are through stories and movies. Using pop culture with a purpose is always an excellent way to increase engagement – a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down!

These teaching tools provide narratives that students can connect to because they're familiar from other areas of study and their lives outside of school. Students can organize their thoughts around stories rather than focusing solely on scientific

and informational texts or textbooks.

One option is using the 1971 book *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss and/or the 2012 film adaptation of the same name. The main character, the Lorax, “speaks for the trees” and must defend the land from entrepreneurs seeking to destroy everything for profit and growth. The story is a cautionary tale about taking responsibility for the stewardship of the environment. As a result, it’s an ideal text to introduce and explore sustainability that works for middle school and high school.

Give students the chance to dive deeper into the book or movie and its connections to sustainability with [this two-week-long low-prep unit](#) featuring an introduction to the topic and activities for the book or movie with a full answer key. You can even extend students’ learning with a differentiated assignment, including a rubric for easier grading, based on the book/movie.

## **Using Nonfiction for Teaching About Sustainability**

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Nonfiction and informational texts are not just an alternative to fictional and pop culture texts, they work well as complements to them. Pairing the two types gives students a chance to make connections and therefore achieve an added depth of understanding.

For example, you could pair your lesson on *The Lorax* with an examination of US environmental economics and policies. Use [this series of lessons](#) to present an overview of economics and policies, then have students practice working with the big ideas and key terms, before applying their knowledge to analyze the Seuss book or movie adaptation.

Once students have a grasp of what sustainability is they can examine what is currently being done to create sustainable living. This can be done through further discussions of environmental policies at the US and international levels. Searching online using terms such as “NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act” or “climate justice” will bring up a ton of current and historical options to use in class.



Add this bundle to your curriculum now!

Another option is to use texts and activities like those in [this bundled unit about land usage, environmental economics and policy](#). This unit ensures students understand how sustainability is affected by economics and how environmental policies actually protect the environment. There are lessons about US and international environmental policy as well as the tragedy of the commons, which is a term used in ecological and economic circles for when individuals act in their own interests rather than the common good when it comes to resources. There are student choice-focused projects about land development related to habitats as well as researching environmental legislation.

## **A Final Word on Teaching About Sustainability**

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Lessons that are educational and actionable beyond the classroom increase student engagement. When students are able to see the ‘value’ in a lesson they invest in it. Since that’s the case, let’s make the most of this by teaching about sustainability! Such lessons can make a significant impact beyond the classroom and on future generations!

Remember, teaching sustainability goes beyond the confines of the classroom. Encourage students to actively apply their learning and take action by initiating sustainability projects within the school or engaging in community initiatives that promote environmental awareness. By integrating sustainability into your teaching

and providing students with practical opportunities to put their knowledge into action, you contribute to creating a generation of environmentally conscious individuals who are prepared to make a positive impact on our planet.

What tips do you have for teaching sustainability in your class? Share them with other teachers in the comments below.

## **SHOP THIS POST:**

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# THE LORAX AND SUSTAINABILITY

## Instructional Unit

# ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS

## Instructional Unit

# LAND USAGE, ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS & POLICY

## BUNDLE OF 4 COMPLETE UNITS!

**TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS**

**ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS**

**US ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

**INTERNATIONAL POLICY & APPROACHES**

**ONE MONTH OF INSTRUCTION!**

### RELATED POSTS:

- [A BETTER WAY TO TEACH SUSTAINABILITY: PART II](#)
- [HOW TO USE VIRTUAL FIELD TRIPS IN YOUR CLASSROOM](#)

- **CREATING CHANGE THROUGH THE FUNDAMENTALS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE**