

Introduction to Sustainability Lesson Plan

Grade Levels: 4-12

Big Picture Goal:

Students will be able to assess their individual actions and their overall community's degree of sustainability using the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals as a framework.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate a definition for sustainability that goes beyond environmental or "green" buzzwords.
- Students will be able to reflect on how various sustainable development goals play a role in their lives.

Essential (or Driving) Questions:

- What does it mean to have a sustainable community?
- How do you interact with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in your life?

Evidence of Learning (How will you know if the students met the objective?):

Students will write a reflection on how their idea of "sustainability" has changed since the beginning of the lesson. All of the questions presented during the activity below can also be used as launching points for individual reflection or expanded dialogue or research.

Prior Knowledge: n/a

Vocabulary:

- Sustainability
- Equality (also worth defining vs. Equity)

Materials:

- Printed [UN SDG Cards](#), 1 of each of 17 goals
- Ball of yarn (optional)

Order of Instruction:

Introduction (5 minutes) -

Today, we are going to think about the word “sustainability” and what it means to have a sustainable community. What does the word sustainability mean to you? What would it mean for our community to be sustainable? There are actually many different definitions of sustainability, and even the experts in the sustainability field sometimes argue about the definition they prefer. Today, we are going to focus on how the United Nations has defined sustainability by laying out 17 global goals for sustainable development.

Here are some other definitions of sustainability you can bring up before mentioning the UN Sustainable Development Goals or at the end of the activity:

- *Brundtland Report 1987 Definition - “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*
- [Triple Bottom Line - “People, Planet and Profit”](#)

Activity (30-40+ minutes) -

Transition the students over to an area where the [17 UN SDG cards \(slides 2-18\)](#) are laying out in a large circle, big enough for students to walk around and move between the goals.

Again, these are things the United Nations thinks we need to constantly consider together if we are going to have a sustainable global future. Please take a few minutes to walk around in silence and read them all. After you have read each goal, choose the one that is the most important to you and stand next to that goal. Once you have chosen the one most important to you and you are waiting for others to pick their goal, please think of a story from your personal life that explains why this goal is so important to you.

Wait a few minutes for students to settle on their goal and have time to think.

Now, turn to the person next to you and tell them your story. As they are telling their story, listen closely. I am going to ask a few people to share with the whole group after this, but will ask you to share your partner’s story, not your own. After

you hear your partner's story, please ask them if there are part of it (or all of it) that they would rather not be shared with the whole group.

Give students 5 minutes or so to share with each other. Ask for volunteers to share their partner's story with the rest of the group. Depending on time, repeat the above "move, think, tell, share" progression for any of the following questions:

- Which goal do you know the least about or most want to know more about?
- Which goal do you think is the most important to a parent or another adult mentor in your life?
- Which goal do you think people will be most concerned about in 200 years?

If time allows, after asking one of the above questions where your students are particularly well dispersed amongst the various goals, do this additional activity with a ball of yarn to get "systems thinking" juices flowing.

Can someone give me a concrete example of how the goal they are standing at connects to another goal and toss the ball of yarn to that goal? For example, reducing gender pay inequality (Goal 5 - Gender Equality) could help reduce poverty issues (Goal 1 - No Poverty).

Now that we have a web of connections between all of these goals, we can see how making sustainable decisions requires us to think about the whole system, or all of these goals at the same time, in every decision we make. If we stop thinking about one of these goals (instruct one student to drop their part of the web), the whole system starts to fall apart.

(10 minutes) Debrief, Reflection and Conclusion

How has your definition of "sustainability" changed since the beginning of this activity? Would you consider our school to be a sustainable community? Why or why not? How about our city? Our country? What is a way you can take action right now to help us move towards becoming a sustainable community?

Resources:

- Chatham University Eden Hall Campus K-12 Program Resources Page - <https://www.chatham.edu/edenhall/k12/resources.cfm>
- UN Sustainable Development Goals Official Website - <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- World's Largest Lesson - <http://worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org>

- Malala Introduces the World's Largest Lesson (video, written by Sir Ken Robinson) - <https://vimeo.com/138852758>

Opportunities for Extension:

- Come up with an outline, stakeholder analysis and timeline for a project you could complete to make your school or community more sustainable. Try to address as many of the UN SDGs in your project design as possible. Propose your project to your principal, the school board, or whomever you need to to make it happen! Apply for a grant if funding is needed.