

CLIMATE BALLOONS

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OBJECTIVE // In this participatory group learning activity, students in grades 7-12 will:

- 1) Critically analyze the local human causes of climate change and the negative global impacts of climate change, and
- 2) Take action by proposing individual and community initiatives to reduce the negative impacts of climate change.

This interdisciplinary activity is aligned with religion, social studies and science curricula.

TIME // 45-60 minutes

GROUP SIZE // 10-30 people

MATERIALS //

- Materials to build an enclosure (no larger than 0.5m² per participant, 30cm-1m tall)
Suggestions for an enclosure: tables on their side, boxes set side-by-side, an improv arena, or blankets that are tucked under the feet and over the backs of chairs.
- Balloons (about 10 per participant)
- GOOS paper (Good On One Side paper)
- Markers

HOW TO PLAY //

1. As the group gathers, have the students blow up the balloons and place them outside the enclosure.
2. Gather the group, asking them to let the balloons rest while you explain the activity. Divide the group in half, asking half of the students to sit inside the enclosure. Ask them to use the sheet of paper and markers to draw things that they need to live (food, water, shelter) and the people they care about (such as family and friends). This will be their paper-life.
3. As they are drawing, explain to the group that:
 - Those within the enclosure represent our sisters and brothers who live in countries in the Global South such as Ethiopia, Honduras and the Philippines. The majority of the people in these countries produce their own food by farming, fishing or raising livestock.
 - Those outside the enclosure represent Canadians, who are among the greatest contributors to anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change.

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In this activity, those outside the enclosure will be doing a lifestyle assessment, putting balloons into the enclosure to represent our climate-harming habits.

Those inside the enclosure will try to protect their homes, food and water sources, and the people they care about, from the negative effects of climate change – represented by the balloons.

3. Collect the markers and ensure that the students within the enclosure are ready to go. They must sit with their sheet of paper on the floor in front of them, and use their arms and their body to keep balloons off this paper-life.
4. Read aloud the statements on the next page. Those outside the enclosure will put balloons into the enclosure for each applicable statement.

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CLIMATE-WARMING PRACTICES

North America has about 5% of the world's population, but is responsible for 20-25% of the world's climate-warming emissions from transportation.

For every airplane flight you have taken in the past year, put a balloon into the enclosure.

Canada is among the top energy producers in the world. Although most of the energy we use here in Canada comes from sustainable sources such as hydroelectricity, Canada still produces 87% of its energy from oil, natural gas and coal, which is mostly sold to the United States.

We all benefit from the profits of the sale of fossil fuels, so each Canadian participant adds a balloon.

10% of the world's population accounts for 80% of motorized passenger kilometres.

Add a balloon if you used fossil fuels to get here today (by car or bus).

Add a second balloon if you arrived in a vehicle carrying fewer than three people.

Because of climate change, the growing season in Ethiopia is shorter by 15%. It is hotter and drier, even though Ethiopians are among lowest carbon emitters in the world. 85% of Ethiopians are rural farmers who rely on the rain to grow their food.

Choose one to three people within the enclosure to represent Ethiopian farmers. These participants must stand beside their paper-life for the rest of the game.

Beef production requires 28 times more land and 11 times more water than does pork or chicken, and creates five times as many climate-warming emissions.

Add a balloon for each serving of meat you ate yesterday.

Add a second balloon if it was beef.

Industrial farming and food transportation produce climate-warming emissions.

Add a balloon if the last vegetable or fruit you ate came from more than 100 km away, or if you do not know where it came from.

If we continue warming the planet at today's rate, an additional 200 million people will be at risk of hunger by 2050, and water shortages will affect nearly half the world's population.

Ask a few of the Canadians to enter the enclosure.

Give them a sheet of paper they must now protect from the balloons.

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CLIMATE-WARMING PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

Women are often more affected by droughts and natural disasters caused by climate change than are men. This is because they have less mobility as the primary child-carers and farm workers.

All females within the enclosure must keep one arm behind their back for the rest of the game.

Bottled water takes 2,040 times more energy to produce than tap water.

Add a balloon if your school or parish is not a Bottled-Water Free Zone.

Trees clean our air, yet deforestation is used to create more land to graze cattle and grow crops. Palm and soy plantations, the most common sources of vegetable oil, are major causes of deforestation.

These oils are used in fried food, many processed foods and margarine.

Add a balloon if you have consumed vegetable oil in the past 24 hours.

If you don't know, add one balloon anyway, as these oils are found in many processed foods.

Deforestation allows us to mine minerals from below the Earth's surface. In Honduras, small communities are fighting mining projects which remove trees and contaminate the water and soil with toxic metals such as mercury and cyanide.

Add a balloon for every electronic item you own such as a cell phone, MP3 player or laptop. They all contain minerals and metals produced by mining.

Add another balloon for each device you have 'upgraded' before the previous version was broken beyond repair.

We often use disposable items without thinking of the climate impact of their production, transportation and disposal. Canadians produce more garbage per capita than any other nation, averaging 729 kg per person in 2010.

Add a balloon if your breakfast or lunch created garbage today.

Plastic is made from oil, which is not renewable. Fossil fuels contribute to climate change when they are used to extract and refine oil, and to manufacture plastic goods.

Add a balloon if you used new plastic produce bags the last time you went shopping.

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CLIMATE-WARMING PRACTICES (CONTINUED)

Ocean temperatures are rising; endangering coral reefs. In the Philippines, 60% of the population live on the coast and rely on agriculture and fishing for food and livelihoods. The loss of coral reefs reduces the fish supply, but also leaves the coast vulnerable to increased flooding, soil erosion, saltwater intrusion and drought.

Choose neighbouring participants from outside the enclosure to create a 'wave' of balloons going into the enclosure.

Those people affected by the wave may no longer use their arms to defend their paper-life.

The cotton in a single t-shirt is produced with up to 2,700 litres of water. Its manufacture creates about 10.75 kg of carbon emissions.

Add a balloon for every item of clothing you bought this year because you wanted it, rather than needed it.

Check the tag of your shirt. If your shirt was not made in North America, add one balloon for the fuel used to transport it here.

SOURCES //

- devp.org/feelingtheheat
- ipcc.ch/report/ar5
- nrcan.gc.ca/publications/statistics-facts/1239
- statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-621-m/2007062/tbl/4054462-eng.htm
- statcan.gc.ca/pub/16f0023x/2013001/longdesc-ct003-eng.htm
- systain.com/fileadmin/Dateien_Systain/Daten/Download_Dokumente/sys_Studie_carbonfootprint_english.pdf
- theguardian.com/environment/2014/jul/21/giving-up-beef-reduce-carbon-footprint-more-than-cars
- video.nationalgeographic.com/video/cotton-tshirts

BREAK FOR DISCUSSION

Pause the activity here to discuss the current situation. Use the following prompts as needed:

- Those inside the enclosure, how do you feel?
- Those outside the enclosure, how do you feel?
- Were you surprised by some of the facts?
- Were there some facts you might not have connected with climate change before this activity?

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REDUCING OUR FOOTPRINT

Now we will focus on what we can do to reduce our carbon footprint locally. This will in turn reduce the negative global impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable populations. Ask participants to propose alternative solutions to the climate-harming habits above, and remove balloons accordingly.

For example, participants could remove balloons if they:

- Use self-propelled transportation such as cycling or skateboarding; reduce air travel; carpool; or ride in electric vehicles (charged from renewable sources).
- Reduce packaging when shopping and eating; reuse produce bags and use cotton bags for dry goods and other types of shopping bags; reuse lunch containers; compost at home and at school.
- Purchase local, organic, or fair trade foods (including meat); grow vegetables, fruits and herbs; reduce meat intake; support community gardens; and mulch gardens to reduce water needs.
- Have water refill stations at school and community events instead of bottled water.
- Decrease clothing and electronics purchases by reducing, reusing, repairing, sharing, and then recycling.

BREAK FOR DISCUSSION

Pause the game again to re-evaluate the situation. Discuss:

- What improvements have been made in the enclosure?
- Why might improvements take a long time to see? (As with negative effects, positive changes can take time to show results).
- What climate-harming practices were we not able to address through these individual practices? (Such as Canada's energy production, global deforestation, the transportation of international goods and women's vulnerability).

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POST–ACTIVITY DISCUSSION//

Discuss other factors that prevent us from making climate-friendly decisions. For example, the price of imported food vs. local food; food, clothing and transportation decisions made by parents or others; the time, energy and effort needed to begin and sustain alternatives; a lack of options, particularly in rural areas; and the lack of choice in provincial energy sources. As appropriate, discuss viable alternatives to these problems.

You could go further and identify decision makers at the municipal, provincial, federal and international levels. Who can be influenced and how? Identify who is responsible for decisions or structures (for example international trade agreements affect food costs, while provincial and federal governments regulate the energy sector).

Aware of the many challenges we face, discuss what guidance we can take from the values we hold:

- **Common Good:** We must consider the good of others, and the good of the whole human family, in organizing our society. We must love our neighbours, locally and globally, and prioritize the good of the human family over commercial interests.
- **Preferential Option for the Poor:** The moral test of any society is how the most vulnerable are treated. We are called to prioritize those who are in most need of our solidarity.
- **Stewardship of Creation:** The Earth is sacred. Creation has its own intrinsic value. We have a responsibility to protect and to cherish the Earth's ecological diversity. Together, we must hold it in trust for future generations.
- **Rights & Responsibilities:** We have a right to those things which are required for human dignity. Rights arise from the things that we need to live a dignified life. These are innately linked to our responsibility to ensure the rights of others – that we do not take more than is needed to fulfill our rights at the expense of another's.
- **Economic Justice:** The economy must serve people, and not the other way around. All persons have a right to dignified work, and to fair wages and working conditions. Work is more than a way to make a living: it is a way of continuing to participate in the ongoing work of Creation.

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TAKE ACTION!

Many of the largest contributions made to climate change are beyond our own individual control. These include Canada's energy production and export, and international agreements that regulate the trade and transportation of goods.

This is why Development and Peace is asking you to make a personal commitment to reduce your climate impact and to put pressure on our government to make real changes for the benefit of our climate in both national policy and in international agreements.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO?

Individual: From reducing our meat intake to reducing the amount of fuel used to heat our homes, there are many things we can do to reduce our energy consumption and climate impact.

Ask each participant to write a personal commitment to the climate and a corresponding fact on one of the game's balloons and use it as a conversation starter with their families. Set a time to discuss progress and recommit to these goals.

Community: Discuss how this group could act for the climate in their community. Set a time to organize this project. It might be a green school certification program, a community garden, a policy on local foods, an education fair on climate-friendly alternatives or a community swap or share program. Older students could lead school-wide climate-friendly programs, which can be integrated into class time through leadership, citizenship, science or religion classes and extra-curricular activities. Organize a Climate Vigil to involve your community in global climate action.

National/International: Sign a Development and Peace Action Card telling the Prime Minister about your personal commitment to the climate and asking the Prime Minister to make similar changes at the national and international levels. Learn about Canada's sustainable energy potential and meet with your Member of Parliament to discuss a green-energy plan for Canada. Learn about Canada's record with international climate change agreements, and tell the government what you want them to do for the climate.