

Tool 3.1



Belonging to nature

CLARITY Competence Area:

Embracing values that sustain the lives of all living beings

GreenComp Competence Area:

Embodying sustainability values

Why use this tool?

This tool can help learners feel one with nature and take responsibility towards individual, collective and planetary health and wellbeing. Healthy ecosystems are critical to limit the effects of climate change and build long-term resilience. They are also critical to biodiversity, which is the foundation of life on Earth as we know it. Our lack of connection to animals, plants and fungi plays a part in our acceptance of the damage and destruction that ecosystems suffer from in the name of growth, progress or development. This tool helps re-connect learners to animals, plants and fungi, even in contexts where taking them to natural areas may be difficult.

Activity 3.1.1

Council of all beings

Overview

The Council of All Beings serves as a powerful tool for environmental education, personal transformation, and community building. It helps people recognize their interconnectedness with nature and fosters a sense of responsibility towards the wellbeing of the Earth and all its inhabitants. By embracing the perspectives of non-human beings, individuals can gain a deeper appreciation for the diverse life forms that share the planet with us and work towards a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence.

The purpose of this activity is to help individuals and groups develop a sense of empathy and ecological awareness by stepping into the perspectives of other living beings. It aims to challenge anthropocentric thinking, where humans see themselves as separate from and superior to the rest of the natural world. Instead, it encourages a more interconnected view of life and promotes a sense of responsibility and care for all beings and ecosystems.

This activity is an adaptation of Joanna Macy's "Council of All Beings". For further information, see the reference section.

Curriculum linkage

Science, Language & Literature, Physical Education & Health (Wellbeing & Mindfulness) and Sustainability & Climate Education

Competences built

Self-reflection, perspective taking, humility, deep listening

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

Tool 3.3: Listening



BASIC INFO

Age range:

12+

Duration:

45 minutes to 3 hours

Group size:

5-30

Level of difficulty:

Intermediate

Materials/space required:

Arts and crafts materials and supplies. Natural resources can be used, like leaves, sticks, pine cones, etc.

Location:

Flexible

Engagement of external stakeholders:

None



Steps in the activity

1. Individual reflection
2. Experimentation
3. Collective reflection

Step 1: Individual reflection

1. Invite learners to join the meeting of all beings. Explain to them that the goal of the meeting is to give a voice to different more-than-human life forms.
2. Give learners some time to think about what life form they believe should be represented in the council. Life forms could be an animal, a swamp, a river, a plant or any natural entity that resonates with them. They can go with the first lifeform that shows up in their mind.

Step 2: Experimentation

1. Once learners have chosen a life form, give them some time to embody it, by walking, moving or speaking like this life form. Learners should also reflect on the being's experience of life and its relationship with the environment. Learners can address the following question: how is that being affected by human activity and climate change impacts?
2. Optional: Invite learners to create a mask or a costume to help them embody the being they represent at the Council.
3. Invite learners to come together and form the "Council of All Beings." Open the meeting by welcoming all the life forms represented. Following recommendations by Joanna Macy, it is possible to open the council by calling upon [the beings of the three times](#), and/or acknowledging the four directions. Alternatively, a poem could be read to open the council with younger learners.
4. Each learner is invited to embody the being they have chosen and speak on their behalf and from their perspective. You can invite learners to talk about their beings' joys, concerns, perspectives on the current state of the world and ecological challenges.
5. Invite the learners who are not speaking to listen attentively and respectfully to each being's message. Learners are also welcome to express understanding and empathy with the experiences of the other beings.



Step 3: Collective reflection

1. Once all beings have expressed themselves, invite learners to put their masks aside (metaphorically or concretely), and express their feelings and concerns from a human perspective. This allows learners to share their insights and feelings about the experience and explore how it impacted their understanding of their place in the ecological web.
2. Encourage learners to share their thoughts as humans more than once and to engage in a dialogue on topics of interest to the group.



Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Use a “talking piece”: consider using a meaningful object, like a stone or stick, as a talking piece to signify who has the floor. This helps to create a focused and respectful space for sharing.
- Welcome all forms of expression: encourage learners to express themselves freely through masks, costumes, or other creative representations of their chosen being. The key is respect for the being and the space, not perfection.
- Create a special atmosphere: set a calm and unique tone for the meeting. Consider using natural elements like candles, a mandala, or symbolic representations of the four directions to enhance focus and mindfulness during the gathering.

Don't:

- Don't judge learners' expressions: avoid critiquing how someone embodies or represents their chosen being. All creative efforts are valid and should be honored.
- Don't force participation: allow learners to choose their level of sharing. If someone feels uncomfortable speaking or contributing, respect their boundaries and don't push them to share.

Adaptations:

This tool can be linked to 2.3 Connecting with the animal, and activity 2.4.5 Nature-based Art.

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how *you* want to be treated, but how *they* want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.



References

[Joanna Macy](#)'s "Council of all beings" in Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World (1998). <https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/council-of-all-beings/>

Some inspiration for costumes or masks can be found [here](#).



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Activity 3.1.2

Giving a voice to plants

Overview

Each learner brings a plant or a mushroom with them when discussing certain topics with the group. The learner can speak in the name of the plant or mushroom, as custodian of nature, or as a defender of the principle of reciprocity with nature. This activity gives an opportunity to reflect on the needs and rights of the more-than-humans in relation to day-to-day issues or concerns expressed in the classroom or among the group.

Curriculum linkage

Civics & Social Studies, Citizenship & Democracy and Natural Science (Biology), or student parliaments or other students' dialogue spaces where all the learners come together to discuss specific issues related to the group.

Competences built

Perspective-taking, interconnectedness thinking, empathy, exploratory thinking

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

Tool 3.3: Listening

Steps in the activity

1. Research
2. Experience
3. Reflect



BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

45-60 minutes, with some homework done beforehand

Group size:

Flexible

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

Some living plants or images of plants

Location:

Flexible

Engagement of external stakeholders:

None



Step 1: Research

1. Before engaging in the activity in class, give your learners some homework. Ask your learners to find a plant or a mushroom they like and would like to speak for at the gathering. The plant or mushroom should preferably be a living plant in a pot that they can move easily. An alternative would be a photo of an image of a living plant they would like to speak for. Ask learners to do research about the conditions that their specific plant or mushroom needs to thrive. For younger learners, this may require that they ask their parents. For older learners, research could include identifying which needs of the plant cannot be met in nature because of the current rate of pollution, biodiversity loss or because of climate change.

Step 2: Experience

1. When in school, have learners sit in a circle with their plant/mushroom or the image of their plant/mushroom next to them, so that the plants/mushrooms are part of the circle as well. Have a first round of introduction with learners introducing the name of the species of the plant/mushroom, where it comes from and what it needs to thrive in a few sentences.
2. If you are doing this activity as part of a regular 'Student Parliament' activity, engage in discussing current issues with learners and invite them to bring in the perspective of the plant or mushroom they speak for when relevant. If the learners struggle to bring in the plants' or mushrooms' voices, you could ask 'What would your plant/mushroom say to this?'.
3. If you are doing this activity as standalone, you can invite the plants/ mushrooms and the learners to discuss the school's policy in relation to climate change and/or the environment (e.g. the school policy on food/food waste, how to get to school, what to do in the playground...), and suggest that they share the views of the plants/mushrooms on it, as well as suggestions for the health and wellbeing of the plants/mushrooms.

Step 3: Reflect

1. At the end of the conversation, invite learners to reflect on the experience of speaking for a plant/mushroom, as well as on the new ideas that emerged through the discussion. Was something unexpected? Are they inspired to further understand the needs of plants/mushrooms and better take them into account? Do they feel less separateness and more belonging to their ecosystems after the activity?
2. Optional: Repeat this activity throughout the year and/or at the change of seasons, to dive deeper into the needs and lives of plants/mushrooms, as well as into the functioning of the local ecosystem.





Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Encourage learners to speak up for their plant by modeling the assignment and bringing a plant yourself when sitting in the circle.
- Encourage learners to ask you questions about their own plant/mushroom anytime, so that they can clarify the needs of the plant/mushroom before they speak, while they intervene, or following the intervention of another learner.
- Answer questions that learners may have about their plants/mushrooms on the spot, if you can, so that they can also learn more about the needs of the plant and the functioning of the ecosystem.

Don't:

- Don't interrupt the discussion to correct an incorrect statement about the needs of the plant during the discussion. Correct any mistakes or approximations at the end of the discussion.

Adaptations:

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how *you* want to be treated, but how *they* want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

References

This activity was designed by One Resilient Earth.

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Radliff, Charlotte. "[Teacher Perspectives on the Effect Caring for Classroom Plants has on Adolescents](#)." (2020)



[Joanna Macy's](https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/council-of-all-beings/) "Council of all beings" in *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World* (1998). <https://workthatreconnects.org/resources/council-of-all-beings/>

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