

ASSEMBLY SCRIPT: WHOSE WORLD IS IT ANYWAY?

The following script accompanies a PowerPoint presentation that can be used for either a stand-alone KS3-4 assembly or as part of a classroom session on interdependence and sustainability.

1. Interdependence: The famous botanist Sir Ghillean Prance was once in a small plane that crash-landed in the Amazonian rainforest. For several days he and his companions were totally without any outside help. They had no water, food, warm clothing, shelter, medicines or weapons to protect themselves. Sir Ghillean claims that they found everything they needed from plants – they made channels and cups to collect water, string and clothing, sticks and leaves for shelters, fruit and nuts for food, and were even able to use certain plants for medicines. It's a powerful illustration of how we are all, in the end, dependent on the earth around us for everything we need.

2. We depend on a health earth ...
For food ... without it we starve.
For clean air ... without it we choke.
For inspiration ... without it we wither.
For treating illnesses ... without it we ultimately die.
Biodiversity is essential for pollination, pest-control, waste-disposal, pollution control, agriculture, energy-production, clean water

3. Scientists and governments from nearly 100 countries have taken part in something called the 'Millennium Ecosystem Assessment'. They have looked at planet earth as our home – and at the things we need from it – its ecosystem services – to see how healthy the planet really is.

4. Their findings are quite scary. We are overusing planet earth's resources in a dramatic way:
Food: Food production must increase to meet the needs of an additional 3 billion people over the next 30 years
Water: 1/3 of global population now subject to water scarcity. Number will double in next 30 years
Timber: Wood is the only source of fuel for 1/3 of the global population. Wood demand will double in the next 50 years.

5. The result is that our security as people on this planet is under real threat:
Deserts: Over 1/3 of the earth's surface, and 250 million people directly affected by desertification.
Wildlife: 5,000+ animal & 6,800 plant species now threatened with imminent extinction.
Climate Change: Oceans likely to warm 2°- 6° by 2050, melting ice-caps, and long term perhaps raising sea-levels more than 20 ft.

6. In many ways the key question we need to answer in the 21st century is 'Whose world is it anyway?'
7. Taken an example ... Alaska – the biggest state in the USA, and the most northerly. But who does it really belong to? It contains enormous reserves of oil and gas, yet is one of the world's last remaining true wilderness areas. It was part of Russia for centuries before the USA bought it for \$1,000,000 just over 100 years ago. Its human inhabitants, the Inuit, have lived there for many thousand years. To whom does Alaska belong? To the American Government in far-away Washington DC? To local people? Or does Alaska belong to the Caribou, the Kodiak Bears, the seals and the Bald Eagles, for whom it is their only home? Can decisions about such a vast area, which will affect ecosystems far more widely, safely be taken by one nation or does the rest of the world have a say?
8. Or we could look at farming around the world. Who do the crops and the land itself really belong to? In a world where in the UK we throw away 1/3 of all our food at home and yet millions are hungry every day, is it really our food, or actually somebody else's we're chucking out? And what about GM crops? Should we allow powerful companies to put a patent on naturally occurring genes that they take out of one plant and put into another? Should we be clearing forests that are home to rare species, and fields that grow food for poor people just to grow biofuels so the rich can fly around the world?
9. What about what we put into the land and seas? Who owns the soil which can be damaged by lost of pesticides and fertilizers – is it the farmers, or does the wildlife itself have a say ... or future generations that will have to live on the land? And the oceans – who do they belong to? Should we allow them to simply become a dustbin for toxic waste and effluent?
10. The question, "Whose earth is it anyway?" needs to be asked in lots and lots of places. Does the earth belong to landowners, or to every human being alive? And what about those who aren't born yet – does it belong to them? And what about birds, animals, fish... do they have any ownership of the earth?
11. In Britain today, our impact on the earth – our ecological footprint – means that as a country we are part of the problem rather than part of the solution. We are causing the earth to be pretty unwell (click). If everybody on the planet wanted to live as we do, it would need more than 3 planets like earth to produce all the food, water, forests, coal, oil and everything else that we in Britain consume.
12. Today many people – not just teachers – but politicians, business leaders, faith leaders and others – recognise that we need to have a sustainable world – one where what we use today does not stop there being enough for tomorrow – one where we balance our greed for

economic growth with our need to be ecologically sustainable, and to be socially responsible.

13. Whose earth is it anyway? Many religions would say that the earth belongs to none of us – it belongs to God. In Psalm 24, which Christians, Jews and Muslims all regard as part of their sacred writings, it states, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” Perhaps we should have a sense of reverence and respect for this planet and all it contains.

Whatever you believe, let us remember that the earth is not just for us. It isn’t a disposable product we can just replace when it runs out. It’s the only home we’ve got. In a moment of quiet reflection, think about how you treat the earth – for instance in how you travel, what you buy, and what you eat. Whose earth is it anyway?