

# BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE CLASSROOM

*"Be the change you wish to see in the world"*

-Mahatma Gandhi

## PERSONAL CHANGE:

More than any other change you make to the classroom – your personal choices will have the biggest impact on your students!

## THE EASY STUFF

- ❑ **Bring your own travel mug:** Commercial coffee cups and lids go directly into landfills, where they have become a major presence.
- ❑ **Buy a #1 teacher canteen!** 2.7 million tons of plastic are used to bottle water each year, and more than 86% of plastic water bottles end up in landfills.
- ❑ **Say no to plastic bags:** 500 billion to 1 trillion end up in landfills, blowing through the streets or harming animals on land and in the ocean. Alternatives? BYOB!
- ❑ **Plant a tree, or two, or THREE.** Plants takeout CO<sub>2</sub> and add O<sub>2</sub> to the air.  
*"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the next best time is now".* – Chinese proverb
- ❑ **Kill the phantoms!** Whenever possible, use a power-bar that you can switch off at night. Alternatively, unplug all electrical cords at the end of the school day. They're still draining power even if the appliance is turned off.
- ❑ **Buy a stapler that DOESN'T need staples!** If everyone switched we would literally save tons in steel a year.
- ❑ **Greenery in the classroom** removes toxins from indoor air. Some are affective in removing CO<sub>2</sub> (Spider Lilies and Peace Lilies), others formaldehyde (Ficus and Aloe Vera).
- ❑ **Set up recycling stations** throughout the classroom. Paper, plastic (hopefully this will be empty!), and garbage bin with biodegradable bags.
- ❑ **Read The Lorax** by Dr. Suess! It's a great way to combine Literacy and Sustainability.
- ❑ **Litter-less lunch and Classroom Waste Challenges!** Challenge your students to bring a lunch that leaves no trace. Extend this challenge by measuring the waste produced by each classroom in your school over the course of a year.



## THE MODERATELY CHALLENGING STUFF

- ❑ **Ask your class** about sustainability and conservation. What does it mean to them? Encourage them to share their fears.
- ❑ **Maintain positivity!** While your intentions will be pure, you may be scaring your students into apathy. Follow the 1:1 rule, for everything they have to worry about, highlight what they don't.
- ❑ **Commute to work once a week** (by biking, busing or carpooling), and let you students know WHEN and WHY you do it.
- ❑ **Become one with the almighty worm!** Worms can consume their own waste daily, creating worm humus a great natural fertilizer for your school garden. Did you know your worm composter can be kept in the classroom?
- ❑ **Build a community garden**, and if that's too much, how do tomatoes sound? Not only will your class save on food miles, but they will have an opportunity reconnect with the earth and learn valuable skills.
- ❑ **Restock the earth;** convince your school to purchase sustainable and energy efficient products. Post-consumer paper, fair trade and organic coffee, and locally produced food..... just to name a few.
- ❑ **Build contacts!** Are there any local businesses that could benefit from an environmental partnership with your class or school? If so, convince them to save their paper that has been used on one side, and REUSE it for handouts in your class.
- ❑ **Work with your colleagues.** Remember to provide support and resources for your colleagues and work together to create a sustainable school.
- ❑ **Go outside...** a lot... Find reasons why you and your students should be saving nature. Can you teach a Math lesson under a tree in September? Could you discuss the chemical composition of air in May?
- ❑ **Participate!** Earth Day (April 22<sup>nd</sup>), Cleanup the World Day (third weekend in September), TD Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup (September)...

*"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"*

-Confucius



*“In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.”*

-Baba Dioum

## THE CHALLENGING STUFF

*Moving towards a sustainable future...*

- ❑ **Count food miles.** To reach your plate an average meal travels 22,000 miles. Challenge your class to eat locally: record their observations and results.
- ❑ **Calculate your carbon footprint.** Do the students fall in the frequent flier, average Joe, or tree hugger categories? What can they adjust in their lives to make the most dramatic impact to their footprints?
- ❑ If your students are mature enough... highlight several current places to watch that are already feeling the **effects of global warming.** The Great Barrier Reef, New Orleans, Venice, Canadian Arctic, and Kilimanjaro, to name a few.
- ❑ **Find a hero!**  
David Suzuki hopes to “*find ways for society to live in balance with the natural world that sustains us*”.  
Al Gore, current founder and chair of Alliance for Climate Protection, or Yvon Chouinard, founder of the clothing company *Patagonia*, whose initiatives have consistently promoted environmentalism. Or maybe Rachel Carson, the writer many attribute to starting the modern environmental movement after authoring *Silent Spring*, plus John Muir, Greg Nickels, and William McDonough....the list goes on.
- ❑ **Adopt a glacier** and track its progress over the years. Does it grow and thrive- or shrink and wither? Glaciers are canaries in the global warming coal mine, letting us know what has and is happening to our atmosphere.
- ❑ **Find a mascot:** Inky the Whale, or our three Pacific White Sided Dolphins, Helen, Hana and Spinnaker. In what way were these animals affected by human actions? What can WE do to help?

### Additional Resources:

- [www.vanaqua.org/schoolprograms](http://www.vanaqua.org/schoolprograms)
- Inky the Whale  
<http://www.viddler.com/explore/aquaweb/videos/13/>
- Great Pacific Garbage Patch  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=en4XzfR0FE8>  
(or search [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) for many more clips)
- [www.bcreengames.ca](http://www.bcreengames.ca)
- [www.metrovancouver.org](http://www.metrovancouver.org)  
(search: education)
- [www.bctf.ca/eeepsa](http://www.bctf.ca/eeepsa)
- [www.learnnowbc.ca](http://www.learnnowbc.ca)
- <http://www.teachertube.com/>
- Worm Composting  
<http://cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html#wormcompost>  
&  
<http://www.metrovancouver.org/about/publications/Publications/wormcompostbrochure.pdf>

