

Introduction to the Curriculum and Lessons

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Lessons in the Earth Scouts curriculum follow a predictable sequence. These activities include:

- Opening ceremony
- Activities for Inspiration
- Activities for Understanding
- Activities for Demonstrating
- Activities for Action
- Closing Circle

Although the activities for each age group are designed to be appropriate for that age and may not appeal to older children, beginners in the program may need help learning information or understanding ideas "covered" by lower age groups. Most often, children will be able to come in "in the middle" of the program without difficulty, but facilitators will want to consider providing additional preparation for children as needed.

Shown below are a description of each of these activities in the sequence used, and the reason for their inclusion:

Opening ceremony: This quiet time and ceremony have been selected to set the tone for the meeting, to invite the children to put away the hurry and bustle of the world outside the door, and to prepare for a peaceful and joyful time together. However, you choose to begin, taking time at the beginning to set a tone of peace and stillness will communicate to the children that the time they spend together is a special time.

Activities for Inspiration: This activity follows the opening ceremony and is designed to introduce a topic or idea in a way that will inspire the children to feel and think about their connection to the earth, the contribution other living things make to the world and to their lives, or about other concepts of the Earth Charter. Songs, poems, quotations, and stories are most often used to reach the children's hearts as well as their minds.

Activities for Understanding: This activity usually involves using a "talking circle" to discuss the topic introduced in the inspirational activity. The "talking circle" provides a time and context for reflection, sharing ideas, and responding to the lesson theme.

As in the traditional "talking circle," children should sit quietly, keep their hands and feet to themselves, speak one at a time, and listen respectfully to the ideas of others. In the beginning, facilitators might invite the children to create these guidelines (or others) to be written and reviewed as needed. Facilitators may also want to encourage positive behaviors by commenting on how well the children (or specific children) are doing in following the guidelines. See: The Talking Circle for details.

Activities for Demonstrating: The primary purpose of this activity is to develop the lesson theme further and to prepare the children for the action to follow. If you choose a different activity from the one suggested, you'll want to ensure that the activity relates to the focus of the lesson. The children will need to be able to move around at this point and, as often as possible, actually create something with their hands, draw, or go outdoors.

Activities for Action: The action activity ensures that the children have an opportunity to put the principle into practice, if only in one small way. In some cases, the children will do the action step

at home with their families, often with the guidance of an adult. Each facilitator will need to decide if this is practical given the home situations of the children in the group.

Closing Circle: The closing circle takes place at the end of the meeting. It is designed to reinforce the focus of the lesson, provide, again, an opportunity for all to reflect on what they have done together and learned, and to restore to the group a sense of community and peace. Suggestions for conducting this activity are included with the first lesson. See: Closing Circle for details.

Opening Ceremony

Why include an Opening Ceremony?

The opening ceremony is traditionally used in governmental, private organizations and in school settings as a tool to help everyone adjust his or her focus from the outside world to the purpose of the meeting or gathering. A prop like the American flag or opening statement such as the Pledge of Allegiance is often used in many of the governmental or social organizations. It's the formal "okay, let's get started" notice that something is about to begin.

The Earth Scouts also uses a prop and opening statement. The prop could be a white candle, smudge pot with herbs or an incense stick or cone to help the children focus their attention. Each lesson plan has a suggested Opening Ceremony statement.

Use your discretion concerning which Opening Ceremony prop to use.

1. Ask parents how they feel about using a lighted candle or other item.
2. Ask parents if their child is allergic to sage, or if any of them have asthma or another respiratory condition that might become inflamed by burning sage.
3. Be sure to place the lighted prop on a sturdy surface, and for smaller children, be sure to place the prop above the children's reach.
4. You may want to substitute the candle or sage for another cleansing item such as Frankincense scented stick incense.
5. Observe the children's reaction to any aromas. You may need to try other atmospheric cleansing fragrances.

How To Perform An Opening Ceremony

1. Signal the children that the meeting will now begin. You can use an audio signal such as clapping your hands and saying "Opening Ceremony time," or ringing a small bell.
2. Ask everyone to gather into a circle around the ceremonial table, or be able to stand before the table. This table should have a white candle, smudge pot, or incense stick.
3. The Facilitator lights the prop as a prayer or statement concerning the focus of the meeting is said.
4. The prop may be put out immediately after the ceremony, left to burn or put out as part of the Closing Ceremony.

Talking Circle

The "talking circle" is used to facilitate understanding of the principle being discussed.

The ceremony is designed to honor the Indigenous Peoples' tradition of listening to and respecting the views of all. Ceremony has been an important part of life in all cultures because ceremonies provide the context for communication, for sharing of ideas, and for making each individual a valued part of the group.

In Western culture, ceremonies such as weddings and funerals mark important events and set aside time from our busy lives to recognize the importance of these events and to participate in them fully. In the same way, the "talking circle," more formal than, but somewhat like, the family dinner, enables the group to gather together, to put away the busy-ness of the day, and to share their thoughts and feelings.

In Indigenous Peoples' culture, the "talking feather" was passed around the circle as each person shared his or her thoughts and feelings about the issue to be discussed. In the same way, children might use a talking feather as a way of reminding them to wait their turn to speak, to listen to what every other child has to say, and to sit quietly as Native Americans learned to do when conducting this ceremony.

If the group is somewhat large, you may wish to allow children to speak in any order as long as each child feels free to talk and no one child is allowed to dominate the conversation. Children who don't volunteer to speak might be invited to do so before ending the activity. Some children need to be encouraged to share their views, and knowing that their thoughts are valued and will be heard, will be more likely to listen to and respond to thoughts and feelings expressed by others.

After being introduced to the tradition of the talking circle, the children might propose guidelines or the facilitator may provide several, such as:

All children sit quietly, keeping their hands and feet to themselves.
(Get comfortable before beginning the discussion.)
Every child who wishes may speak.
One person talks at a time; the others listen respectfully.

Tips for Reading Aloud

Children in Earth Scouts will benefit enormously from the reading-aloud activities in the program, especially if facilitators use and model for the children effective strategies for getting the most from the literature. Although it would be quite cumbersome to use all of the strategies every time you read a story, it helps the children if you choose one or two each time and use them repeatedly until they become a habit with the children.

Most importantly, help the children become accustomed to the idea that reading a story is a pleasant, un-rushed experience. It's a conversation with the author. Each story is special and teaches us a lesson about the world and our place in it. Like a meal with several courses, reading can be introduced with an appetizer (pre-reading questions to whet the appetite), includes a main meal (the story itself), and ends with dessert (making the story part of us by seeing what it is really about -- the lesson or theme). For young children, you might simply ask what they liked most about the book.

Setting the Scene:

Although it's best if children can sit quietly in a circle on the floor or (for older children in chairs at tables), you may wish to allow them to draw quietly while you read. It helps to get young children settled with enough space between them so they can keep their hands and feet to themselves. Occasionally, you'll have a child in the group who simply is not able to sit still for a story. This child might be given something else to do while you read to the others. Most children will be able to sit still and enjoy a story. Invite them to visualize the story in their minds as you read.

Pre-reading:

Before beginning a story, you might show the children the book cover and ask:

What do you think this story will be about? (The cover or title will provide clues.)

Knowing the topic of a story enables readers to go to that part of their brain where information about that topic is stored and bring it up to the front where it will be ready to add more.

What do you already know about (the topic)?

Giving the children a chance to talk about what they know reinforces their prior knowledge, which is critical to their understanding, and lets other children "piggyback" on the prior knowledge of those who have some experience with or information about this topic.

During reading:

1. *Can you tell where this story is taking place? Is it taking place now or in another time?*

This question invites the children to think about the setting of the story. Knowing the basic story elements they will find in every story helps children filter out information and ensures that they remember the key details:

- S: setting (where and when the story takes place)
- C: characters (who is in the story)
- E: events (aim for three key events, five at the very most)
- P: problem
- R: resolution
- L: lesson about life (or theme) OR just ask *What did you like most?*

2. *Who can tell us what happened so far?*

This question invites the children to use a strategy called *monitoring*. It lets you know if they've been following the action, if they remember the characters, and/or have figured out what the problem is in the story.

3. *What do you think will happen next?*

Predicting what will happen next in a story helps children think as they read about what is happening and what it means. Good readers do this without thinking about it and children who are asked the question often will begin to do it, too.

4. *Do you know what the problem is yet?*

Identifying the *problem* is important to understanding the theme of the story as well, of course, as critical to identifying the resolution of the problem.

5. *What do you think of _____ (character's name)?*

Would you like him/her as a friend?

Why?

Understanding *characterization* (the way the characters are portrayed) helps children understand the lesson of the story. Characters also serve as models for children or as examples of the way they don't want to be. Of course, in most stories, the villains get their just desserts, so children learn through stories that it usually pays to be kind, generous, and thoughtful.

6. *Why did (character) do (or say) action/words?*

This question, too, invites the children to think about characters' motives and personality. Since characters show themselves through their deeds and words, it helps children make the connection between our own words and deeds and the consequences of them.

7. *How do you think this problem is going to be resolved?*

This is another *predicting* question, but it helps children focus on the elements of problem and resolution, which are key to the lesson of the story or theme.

After Reading:

1. *What did you learn from this story?*

Identifying the "lesson about life" or *theme* helps the children learn more about how they might affect the world and others around them. Stories enable us to learn lessons beyond the scope of our individual experience through the experiences of others. Stories also help children care about the world and living creatures -- they reach their hearts as well as their minds.

2. *What did you like best about this story?*

Choosing special elements of the story -- even the illustrations -- enhances children's appreciation for literature and their enthusiasm for using books as a window to the wider world around them.

Tips for Effective Group Discussions

The success of any group discussion depends upon participation. An atmosphere that lends itself to open sharing can only be created when individuals in the group believe that sharing their opinion will be welcomed without judgment. The skillful use of questions can help encourage discussion. During the discussion, it is helpful to:

- Establish an environment that is positive.
- Encourage open communication.
- Keep discussions on a constructive note.

The following tips may be useful in facilitating effective discussions:

1. **Ask for Opinions**

Ask questions that will help people express their ideas, feelings, and encourage discussion. For example:

- What is your reaction to...?
- What is your thinking on...?
- How do you feel about...?

2. **Paraphrase**

One way to help ensure that the speaker feels heard and is understood is to paraphrase (to repeat what you heard them say).

- Let me see if I understand your position. Are you saying that...?
- What I am hearing...Is that right?
- Do you mean that...?

3. **Ask for Clarification**

- I saw a few of you shaking your head. What do you think about what was said?
- I'm not sure I understood that last comment. Would you say more about what you meant by...?

4. Explore an Idea in More Detail

- Are there other things we might consider?
- Would anyone like to add something?
- What are some other ways to look at this issue?

5. Move the Conversation Along

- One of the points made raises an important question...
- Another issue that generates a lot of reaction is...
- We have had a great discussion on this item. What other ideas would you like to discuss?

6. Suggest a Procedure

- I noticed that this side of the room has spoken the most. I suggest that we go around the room to see how others feel.
- Turn to someone near you and talk about [TOPIC] for two minutes, then we'll come back together. [THEN] Okay, let's go around the group and...
- Before we move on with the discussion, discuss with a partner what you think about this point right now.

7. Use language that doesn't convey judgment, but rather conveys respect for other points of view.

- I'd like to check my assumptions
- Let me suggest
- I'd like to propose

Your perspective is important!

(Adapted from Effective Meeting Skills by Marion E. Hayne)

Closing Circle

One way in which our program differs from the Girl and Boy Scout or similar programs, is that we want the children to take some time to connect with themselves, by reflecting upon what they have heard, discussed, learned, seen, or done. Earning badges represents a personal accomplishment, yes, but it's secondary to our purpose. Our children's growth through inspiration, understanding, demonstration, and action are key to both social and environmental changes necessary for our continued existence.

Why include a closing circle?

A "closing ceremony" was performed at the 2003 Earth Summit in Ft. Myers, Florida. Once the participants gathered, the ceremony began with this statement: *Everyone say one thing they are grateful for that day.*

The simple act of taking a few moments to reflect upon and express what one learned made such a profound impact on the participants, many have recommended to their local Earth Charter groups that they include the practice at the close of their meetings.

The Organizers and Curriculum Resource Team have included this vital time for reflection and expression as part of the lesson plan. We also recommend you let the children know this is a good follow-up activity which they can use at home to promote understanding within the family.

How to perform a closing circle

At the end of your meeting, ask the children to gather together, hold hands, and form a circle. Ask a question such as:

"What good thing do you want to remember about this day?"

Then give the children a minute or so to think about the question or how they feel about the subject of the meeting.

To keep the closing circle "fresh" to prevent the ceremony from becoming "automatic" and thereby lose its value, here are a variety of questions you may want to substitute the for the suggested question or two related to the lesson. You are free to make up your own appropriate guiding question.

1. Everyone say one thing they are grateful for today.
2. What are you grateful for as a result of our activity today?
3. What good thing do you want to remember about this day?
4. What did you learn today that you want to take home and use?
5. What did you learn that you want to share with your family and/or others?
6. What did you learn today that you want to begin doing regularly to help others?
7. What did you learn today that could help the earth?
8. Are you willing to begin doing what you learned on a daily basis or as opportunity arises?
9. What have we done (or seen) that brings me new joy?
10. What have we done (or seen) that brings me concern for others?

11. What have we done (or seen) that increased my commitment to the principles of the Earth Charter?

First Meeting

Develop Meeting Guidelines

With your group, develop a set of guidelines concerning how your group will co-operate with each other before, during, and after your meeting. Some examples are:

Guidelines:

1. Respect each other's thoughts, beliefs, and right to speak.
2. One person speaks at a time.
3. Other guidelines written by the group.

When you've completed your working guidelines, make a poster and put it in a place where everyone can see it. These simple rules of conduct can be referred to as a gentle reminder whenever necessary.

Guidelines and Overview for Suggested First Meeting

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines to help adults facilitate a Earth Scouts' meeting. The groups are designed to:

1. Introduce the idea of the Earth Charter to youth and engage them in discussion and fun activities.
2. Collect information that will contribute to the development of the Earth Scout program.
3. Badges: In the Earth Scouts' program, a group can earn one badge in each of the five principle areas of the Earth Charter—economic justice, peace/nonviolence, social justice, and participatory democracy, respect for nature for a total of five badges. When your group completes that principle, they earn a badge.

Lesson Plans

The Facilitator's Handbook has been designed as a continual work-in-progress, and will be added to as lesson plans for each principle are completed by the Resource Team. A "Suggested Opening Exercise" has been included.

This document is also under continuous updating as more materials are designed or located.

Materials

Each adult should have the following materials:

- Earth Scouts' Facilitator's Handbook and Supplement
- Copy of the Earth Charter, a printable version can be found at: www.EarthScouts.org/TheEarthCharterPrintable.htm if needed. A Youth adaptation for young children has been created and included in this document

- Pens/markers/paper to record feedback
- Any materials needed to creatively engage the youth in understanding the assigned Earth Charter principle

Feedback

Please send us your feedback!

1. Fill out Earth Scouts' Feedback Form
2. Collect Responses to questions/exercise and data collected (notes, drawings, etc.)

Introduction:

Facilitator should welcome each child as they arrive and introduce him/herself. Make sure each child signs the sign-in sheet and makes a name tag (optional).

Why are we here?

Give an overview of what they can expect during the meeting today. Mention that you hope they will be actively engaged, ask questions, and talk with each other. Mention the value of team work and the importance of learning from each other.... lead into guidelines:

Guidelines:

Facilitator should go over the guidelines for participating in the meeting: (write on large sheet of paper)

- a. Respect each other's thoughts, beliefs, and right to speak.
- b. One person speaks at a time.
- c. *Now ask participants to add a few guidelines*

How we got here:

Facilitator should read the Earth Charter Preamble. Depending upon the ages of your group, you may choose to read the Young children's version.

Introduction to the Earth Scouts:

1. Facilitator should read **Earth Scouts Mission Statement** below:
Youth have led the way in the development of the mission statement and actually came up with the mission statement: Change the World One Fun Badge At A Time--Youth Working Together To Make the Earth Charter a Reality at Home and in the Community.
2. Facilitator should briefly discuss **how Earth Scouts came to be:**
What are the Earth Scouts? The Earth Scouts is a youth organization based on the Earth Charter principles: respect for nature, economic justice, universal human rights, participatory democracy, and a culture of peace.

Suggested Opening Exercise – All Age Groups

It is important that the children and youth have a sense of "ownership" of the Earth Charter. One way to do this is to ask them to contribute their ideas to a world based on the caring of all life. A series of questions can lead them there and the following is an example: (This was done at a Canadian conference on sustainability and the questions were asked by Raffi, the international children's singer who has composed a song for the Earth Charter, "Where We All Belong" and Mark Anielski, Genuine Wealth Economist.

Here are some of the responses (3-15 year olds) when asked a series of questions to identify "What Makes Life Worthwhile for You?"

"What makes you happy inside?"

- The sun
- Trees and animals
- Going outside at night when everyone is sleeping
 - Good food
 - The magic time just before the sun sets
 - Kindness
 - Rocks
 - Friends
 - Spending time with my family
 - Chocolate
 - Mountains
 - Rock climbing
 - Snowballs
 - Christmas time
 - Fishing
 - Seashores
 - Bugs
 - Singing
 - Dogs and birds
 - Halloween
 - Dancing and smiling

"What do you wish?"

- Money
- Toys
- A dog
- I wish we could all be friends.
- I wish we could have cars that produced no poison.
- I wish there were no roads and that we would hover over the land.
- I wish I didn't have to get up in the morning.
- I wish I could be a pigsty.
- I wish I could sit on a flower pedal.

"What do you wish for someone else?"

- I wish Canada had peace together.
- I wish everyone had mud.
- I wish there was no such thing as cigarettes.
- I wish my dad didn't have to go to work.
- I wish my friend didn't have so much homework, so we had more time to play together.
- I wish that everyone could have good food to eat.

- I wish that everyone were healthy.
- I wish that no one would ever die.

"What kind of world do you want to live in?"

- I wish our world were safe.
- I wish there were no more wars.
- I wish we had a world of peace.
- I wish we had a world where animals could talk.
- I wish I knew how to be an animal.
- I wish no more animals got killed.

The Facilitator can then lead from "the kind of world we wish for," to the Earth Charter as a result of people all around the world writing a document on the "world that they wish for," and how similar it is to what the children want. E.g., where all people are treated with dignity and equally, animals are loved, plants and trees are protected, there is no war, everyone has a voice in their government, and all peoples live in freedom and comfort.