

## The Environmentally Active Citizen

### Overview

In this activity, participants will explore the ideal traits and actions of an environmentally active citizen. They will then discuss citizens' environmental responsibilities by creating and presenting skits. Ideally, this activity will culminate with students implementing their own environmental action plan and/or presenting climate change/global warming solutions to local government officials, either by attending a meeting or inviting an official to your school.

### Grade

10

### NC Essential Standards for American History: The Founding Principles, Civics & Economics

- FP.C&G.1.4 - Analyze the principles and ideals underlying American democracy in terms of how they promote freedom (i.e. separation of powers, rule of law, limited government, democracy, consent of the governed / individual rights –life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, self-government, representative democracy, equal opportunity, equal protection under the law, diversity, patriotism, etc.
- FP.C&G.4.3 - Analyze the roles of citizens of North Carolina and the United States in terms of responsibilities, participation, civic life and criteria for membership or admission (e.g., voting, jury duty, lobbying, interacting successfully with government agencies, organizing and working in civic groups, volunteering, petitioning, picketing, running for political office, residency, etc.)
- FP.C&G.4.4 - Analyze the obligations of citizens by determining when their personal desires, interests and involvement are subordinate to the good of the nation or state (e.g., Patriot Act, Homeland Security, sedition, civil rights, equal rights under the law, jury duty, Selective Services Act, rule of law, eminent domain, etc.)
- FP.C&G.4.5 - Explain the changing perception and interpretation of citizenship and naturalization (e.g., aliens, Interpretations of the 14th amendment, citizenship, patriotism, equal rights under the law, etc.

### Essential Questions

- What are the characteristics of an effective citizen?
- What environmental problems are North Carolina communities faced with?
- In what ways do individual citizens and families impact the environment?
- In what ways do local governing bodies impact the environment (such as school boards and city councils)?
- What is the responsibility as citizens and their local governing bodies regarding the environment?

### Materials

- A large strip of paper (bulletin board or butcher paper)
- Markers
- Role Plays and Discussion Questions (attached)

### Duration

1 hour

### Preparation

Students should have a basic understanding of global warming and climate change and the threats posed by such if action is not taken.

### Procedure

#### What Does it Mean to be an Active Citizen?

1. Lead the class in a verbal brainstorm of the word **citizen**. Encourage them to explore all aspects of the word that come to mind. As a group, create a common definition.
2. Ask participants to silently think of what it means to be an **active citizen**. Encourage their thinking by asking:
  - What type of person makes a community a good place to live and go to school?
  - How does an active citizen act and behave? How does an active citizen affect where you live (your neighborhood, your school, your entire city and county, etc.)?
  - What is their attitude like? What do they value?

### **Active Citizenship and the Environment**

3. Next, ask students to specifically consider the environment, and how an active citizen treats the **environment**. Discuss:
  - How does an active citizen feel about the environment specifically?
  - What types of actions does an active citizen take in regards to the environment? (answers may include things like recycle, conserve water, plant trees, pick up trash, etc.)
  - Why might an active citizen feel that caring about the environment, and taking actions to protect and conserve the environment, is important?
4. As a visual extension of this brainstorm, place a large piece of paper with the outline of a body drawn on it on the floor. While students think, direct their attention to the body outline (the outline should be as large as possible, ideally student sized, and titled *The Environmentally Active Citizen*. (If your class is larger, you may divide participants up into smaller groups, with a human outline for each group.)

Explain to participants that they are going to illustrate an environmentally active citizen by filling up the inside of the body outline with all the traits and behaviors of an environmentally active citizen. Tell students that they may write words, draw pictures, use symbols, etc. Allow students to begin, monitoring their work as they write and draw on the inside of the human outline. As they work, continue to ask questions to facilitate further thinking and details. (For example, if a participant has written “responsible”, ask the group to consider specific actions that exhibit environmental responsibility, and instruct them to add those specifics onto their citizen).

5. Once finished, ask the class to step back and view their “environmentally active citizen.” Instruct them to point out the attributes and/or actions that they believe are most important and explain why. See if the class can come to a consensus on the top 5 traits or behaviors an environmentally active citizen should have/exhibit.
6. Next, following the same process as above, instruct students to consider the type of citizen who would have a negative impact on the environment. Encourage students to again brainstorm what traits, characteristics, behaviors, actions, ideas, values, etc. this negative person would encompass. Have students return to the large paper, and write words, pictures, symbols, etc. on the outside of the human drawing that represent a negative citizen who would have a negative impact on the environment.
7. Once finished, discuss:
  - Looking at everything on the outside of our citizen, which comment, symbol, picture, etc. represents what you believe to be the most damaging characteristic, trait, or behavior of a negative citizen and why?
  - What do you think determines whether a person becomes an environmentally active citizen, or a citizen who negatively impacts the environment?
  - Why do you think it is important to be an environmentally active citizen? What consequences might we face if our community is filled with citizens who negatively impact the environment?
  - How might we encourage fellow community members to be “environmentally active citizens?”
8. Next, divide students into four groups and give each group one of the attached scenarios. Students will use this information to create and act out a skit involving positive environmental action in front of the group. The rest of

the group will watch the skit and afterwards discuss the choices they saw the citizens make, and the impact these choices may have on the environment.

Review expectations for group work then allow participants 15+ minutes to develop and practice their role play several times. Encourage students to be creative (i.e. they can create props and set up the scene as they wish, within the subject matter provided to them). Teachers should monitor all groups as they work to ensure students are on track and working to illustrate the core of each scenario in their skit.

9. Once students are ready to present, review the expectations of respectful audience members with students and then allow partners to perform their role plays in front of the whole group. After each performance, all students should give the performers a huge round of applause. Then, teachers should use the skit as a jumping off point for discussion (use the questions below as a discussion guide once each skit is complete). Teachers may decide to edit questions and/or allow the discussions to go in the direction students take them.

10. Discussion questions:

**Scenario 1: Individuals**

- What did you observe in and/or learn from that skit? What are some of the actions individual citizens can take to cool the planet?
- What impact might these actions have on climate change and global warming?
- What are other actions individual citizens can take to make a difference that were perhaps not illustrated in the skit?
- Of all the actions we have discussed, which do you think would have the most positive impact on the environment?
- Why do you think some citizens do not take action to protect our environment or live responsibly in regards to the environment?
- What consequences might our world face if individual citizens don't act responsibly and take action to prevent climate change/global warming?

**Scenario 2: Households**

- What did you observe in and/or learn from that skit? What are some of the actions households can take to cool the planet? Is your household already taking some of these actions? Explain.
- What impact might these actions have on climate change and global warming? Why is it even more important for an entire household to take action, rather than just one individual?
- What are other actions households can take to make a difference that were perhaps not illustrated in the skit?
- Of all the actions we have discussed, which do you think would make the greatest and/or most positive impact on the environment?
- Why do you think some households do not take action to protect our environment or live responsibly in regards to the environment?
- After the skit and our discussion, what is one change you think you can convince your household to make that will help cool the planet?
- What consequences might our world face if households don't act responsibly and take action to prevent climate change/global warming?

**Scenario 3: Schools**

- What did you observe in and/or learn from that skit? What are some of the actions schools can take to cool the planet?
- Consider your school specifically. Is your school already taking some of these positive actions? Explain.
- Describe the amount of waste created by your school. (Encourage students to consider the amount of paper they and their teachers use each day; the amount of beverage containers their school generates and whether they are recycled; the amount of waste produced by food packaging in the cafeteria; etc.)
- What is the state of recycling at your school? Are there recycling bins? Are they used? What improvements could be made?

- What do you think it would take to start a recycling program at your school? Why is it important to advocate for a recycling program?
- What are other actions schools can take to make a difference that were perhaps not illustrated in the skit?
- Why is it important to not only make changes in your own school, but to also present your ideas to School Board members and initiate change across the district?
- After the skit and our discussion, what is the most important change your school could make to help cool the planet? What could you do to help initiate this step?

#### **Scenario 4: Cities**

- What did you observe in and/or learn from that skit? What are some of the actions Mayors and City Council members can take to cool the planet?
- Do you feel your city is currently doing a good job to protect the environment and tackle climate change/global warming? Why or why not?
- Why is it important for citizens to make their opinions known to City Council, and to advocate for city-wide action to cool the planet? What are the ways you can communicate with your City Council?
- If you had the opportunity to sit down with the Mayor, what are some questions you would like to ask him/her regarding the environmental policies of our city? What are some requests you would like to make of him/her regarding environmental policies? (Teachers should note these on chart paper; it is recommended that the Mayor and/or a City Council member be invited to class as a culmination to this activity, in which case teachers may want to refer back to these collected thoughts.)

11. Upon completion of all the skits and discussions, have the group reflect by discussing:

- Thinking about what we saw and discussed today and comparing those ideas to your own beliefs and actions, would you consider yourself an “environmentally active citizen”? Why or why not?
- After our discussion today, how might you improve your traits as a citizen to become more environmentally active?
- As positive leaders, what can we do as individuals to show our community the importance in being environmentally responsible and active?
- Out of all of the skits you viewed, which action would have the largest positive impact on our environment and why?
- What could we do as a group to show others that we mean to impact our environment in a positive way?

11. At the close of the activity, allow students to return to their environmentally active citizen and add any additional actions, ideas, values, etc. that they may have thought of throughout this activity.

#### **Additional Activities**

- Become active environmental citizens by creating and implementing an Environmental Action Plan; see the Consortium’s *Create a Green Campaign*
- Develop and deliver a presentation to your school board or city council advocating for positive environmental policies to be implemented school or city-wide
- Invite a school board or city council member to your class to discuss current environmental policies/procedures, and allow students to ask questions/make suggestions regarding ways to cool schools or the city (see *A Visit From a Local Government Official*).

## Scenario 1: *Green Yourself*

Everyone can reduce the impact they have on the environment and help “cool” the planet by using less energy, consuming more wisely, and living a “greener” lifestyle. Think about the actions you take each day, and be aware of ways you can make sure you aren’t negatively impacting the environment:



- Recycle!
- Plant a tree! A single tree will absorb one ton of carbon dioxide over its lifetime. Shade provided by trees can also reduce your air conditioning bill by 10 to 15%.
- When shopping, it saves energy and waste to use a reusable bag instead of accepting a disposable one in each shop. Waste not only discharges CO<sub>2</sub> and methane into the atmosphere, it can also pollute the air, groundwater, and soil.
- Take your lunch in a reusable lunch box instead of a disposable one, and you save the energy needed to produce new lunch boxes. Likewise, drink from reusable water bottles or mugs.
- Consider where you shop and make an effort to buy local. The average meal in the United States travels 1,200 miles from the farm to your plate. Buying locally will save fuel and keep money in your community.
- Choose products that come with little packaging and buy refills when you can.
- Don’t litter; pick up trash whenever you can, recycling as much waste picked up as possible.
- Reduce the number of miles you are in a car by walking, biking, carpooling or taking mass transit wherever possible. Avoiding just 10 miles of driving every week would eliminate about 500 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions a year.
- Spread the word! Educate others on how to “go green”. Encourage local businesses and restaurants to adopt more environmentally friendly practices.
- Make sure your voice is heard! Express your concern regarding global warming and climate change to governmental officials, the media, and the community. Once you are old enough, make sure you vote. Even before then, you can write letters, gather signatures for a petition, organize an environmental event, and more.

### Your Assignment:

Prepare a **3-4 minute skit** in which a group of friends discuss or illustrate actions they can **individually** take to reduce their carbon footprint and help cool the planet.

Since your classmates won’t necessarily be familiar with the solutions listed above, be sure to have the characters in your skit explain or act out the choices they are making and why.

You can be creative in how you set up your skit, but make sure you stick to the facts and **show individual citizens taking personal action against global warming and climate change.**

## Scenario 2: *Green Your Home*

The choices we make at home test our commitment to maintain a healthy, cool planet. When we burn fossil fuels—such as oil, coal, and natural gas—to light our homes or stay warm or cool inside, we pump carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the air. This thickens the heat-trapping blanket that surrounds the planet, causing global warming. There are many simple things households can do to reduce fossil fuel use, help protect the planet, create a safer environment for the future, and save money on home bills:



- Turn off lights, computers, and electronics when not in use; completely unplug electronics when not in use, since they can still use energy even when off.
- Replace incandescent light bulbs with efficient compact fluorescent bulbs. Start with your five most frequently used lights, or upgrade your entire home.
- Recycle at home. You can save 2,400 pounds of carbon dioxide a year by recycling half of the waste your household generates.
- Conserve water; take shorter showers rather than baths; wash only full loads of laundry; don't leave the water running while rinsing dishes or brushing teeth.
- It takes a lot of energy to heat water, so use less! You can use less hot water by encouraging the head of your household to install a low flow showerhead (350 pounds of carbon dioxide saved per year) and washing your clothes in cold or warm water (500 pounds saved per year) instead of hot.
- Use a clothesline instead of a dryer whenever possible. You can save 700 pounds of carbon dioxide when you air dry your clothes for 6 months out of the year.
- Ask the head of your household to adjust the thermostat; setting the thermostat no higher than 68° F in winter, and no lower than 78° F in summer will result in dramatic savings in money and energy.
- Encourage the adults you live with to purchase energy efficient appliances when it is time to replace them.
- Help the adults you live with clean or replace filters on your home's furnace and air conditioner. Cleaning a dirty air filter can save 350 pounds of carbon dioxide a year.
- Encourage the adults you know to purchase energy efficient vehicles (such as smaller cars or hybrids).

### **Your Assignment:**

Prepare a 3-4 minute skit in which a family discusses or illustrates making household changes to conserve energy and reduce their home's carbon footprint.

Since your classmates won't necessarily be familiar with the solutions listed above, be sure to have the characters in your skit explain the choices they are making and why.

You can be creative in how you set up your skit, but make sure you stick to the facts and **show a household making choices at home to prevent global warming and climate change.**

### Scenario 3 *Green Your School*



Your actions to reduce global warming can extend beyond how you personally reduce your own emissions. Consider where you spend most of your time, other than at your home: school! Students can really influence the impact their school has on the environment by taking action and advocating for certain green school solutions. You and your school can have a positive effect on global warming:

- Organize a recycling program at your school; educate fellow students and teachers about what can be recycled, and why it is important to recycle.
- Discuss the importance of a recycled products purchasing policy with your principal (i.e. any paper purchased will be recycled paper)
- Promote energy efficiency within your school (turning off all lights and computers when not in use; replace incandescent light bulbs with efficient compact fluorescent bulbs; create posters to hang around the school encouraging responsible energy consumption; etc.)
- Sign up to present at your school district’s next school board meeting and advocating “green” school steps such as:
  - Encourage your school board members to adopt a “green” resolution. This is simply an official statement noting their commitment to ensure schools within the district are environmentally friendly and have a positive effect on global warming. Such a resolution can provide a road map to help guide future decisions, such as what kind of bus fleet to purchase or ensuring new schools are built eco-friendly.
  - Advocate for green upgrades to current conditions in your school (waterless urinals, hand sanitizer instead of paper towels, solar panels, etc.)
  - Lobby for the creation of a district–wide recycling program, along with requiring all schools to purchase recycled office and classroom supplies.
  - Request that school board members ensure that new schools are built or refurbished following green school building criteria.
  - Encourage board members to develop a district–wide plan to make schools more energy efficient.

#### **Your Assignment:**

Prepare a 3-4 minute skit that illustrates students taking action to “green” their school, and/or presenting to their School Board members regarding one or more of the strategies above.

Since your classmates won’t necessarily be familiar with the solutions that school and School Boards have the power to make, or why it is important for students to lobby their School Board members to implement these solutions, be sure to have the characters in your skit convey this information.

You can be creative in how you set up your skit, but make sure you stick to the facts and **show students working to green their school, and/or students lobbying the School Board to implement district-wide green strategies.**

## Scenario 4 Green Your City

It is important for individual citizens to make environmentally responsible decisions, but your city's local government officials (Mayor and City Council members), have the authority to make decisions and set policies that affect the entire town or city in which you live. These local government officials can make a positive impact on climate change in many ways, but it will take citizens of your community to encourage them to do so. Mayors and city councils can be encouraged to take actions such as:



- Adopt ordinances that require new buildings to meet environmentally-friendly standards
- Provide economic incentives for businesses to construct buildings that are highly energy-efficient
- Operate existing city or town buildings in an energy-efficient manner (i.e. using energy efficient light bulbs or installing light sensors)
- Encourage citizens to use energy efficient light bulbs by providing a safe place for the disposal of the bulbs
- Reduce traffic congestion and car idling by improving streets, stop lights, and encouraging public transportation
- Support green alternatives to driving, such as bike lanes and public transportation (i.e. fare-free buses)
- Implement "green fleets" (transition city vehicles, such as police cars and buses, to hybrid or bio-diesel fueled vehicles)
- Plant trees
- Recycle waste city-wide
- Adopt smart growth policies that encourage less car driving and reduce residents' burden on the environment
- Promote water conservation
- Educate city residents on ways to reduce consumption and conserve

Local governments have the capacity to inform, educate, and influence the activities of all the citizens in their community. By reducing greenhouse gas-producing activities such as transportation, industry, and solid waste management, local governments can make a big difference. But, it might take the citizens of a town or city to come together and encourage their city council to do so by initiating a letter writing campaign, gathering signatures on a petition, or presenting at a city council meeting and asking for city-wide environmentally friendly changes.

### Your Assignment:

Prepare a 3-4 minute skit that illustrates citizens encouraging city council members to implement one or more "green strategies" for reducing the negative impact of global warming/climate change on your city.

Since your classmates won't necessarily be familiar with the solutions that local governments have the power to make (listed above), or why it is important for citizens to lobby their local governments to implement these solutions, be sure to have the characters in your skit convey this information.

You can be creative in how you set up your skit, but make sure you stick to the facts and **show a group of citizens lobbying the Mayor and City Council Members to implement city-wide green strategies.**