

# Environmental Ethics

## *What, Why, How*

### **WHAT are Environmental Ethics?**

To begin to define environmental ethics, it is helpful to first define ethics. For the purposes of this course, ethics can be defined as a “code of morality; a system of moral principles governing the appropriate conduct for a person or group.” Synonymous ideas include beliefs, values, and principles.

Environmental ethics considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world. There are many ethical decisions that human beings make with respect to the environment. For example, how much alteration of the landscape is tolerable for the purpose of economic gain? And, what environmental obligations do we need to keep for future generations? The issue of environmental ethics is very controversial and often disputed.

### **WHY Consider Environmental Ethics?**

It is important to recognize that the issue of environmental ethics does exist and to realize that people stand at various points along a continuum of ethical decisions and actions as they relate to the environment. Consider, also, that what a person feels or believes may or may not be reflected in their acts. To act on an ethical standard may not be the most convenient or popular method. It takes a little extra effort for a person to use reusable grocery bags at the store, but it results in fewer plastic bags being made and thrown away. You must decide your own position on the scale and how you will act in accordance with your beliefs.

This course follows the premise of a “conservation ethic” in that it follows the belief that the environment has value to humans both now and in the future. Students, as citizens of the community, will need to determine what value they place on our natural resources. Our environmental ethics and actions will determine what the future of the earth will hold for our successors.

### **HOW do Environmental Ethics Fit into the Classroom?**

Ethics is a philosophical subject. Rather than standing alone, environmental ethics can be very valuable when integrated into other subjects: Science (Should we use animals to test new drugs?); History (What was President Theodore Roosevelt’s position on environmental conservation?); Geography (Where are the rain forests being cut that have been so controversial?); Literature (Read Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac*). Environmental ethics lends itself to numerous opportunities for discussion, evaluation, reflection, and research.

A particular ethical stand can’t and shouldn’t be imposed on students. Each person has a background that shapes their unique position. In the classroom, it is the *process* of substantiating a position that can be modeled. Challenging students to consider the reasoning behind their positions through research and personal examination can be an enlightening and rewarding process. Having a solid foundation on which to defend their beliefs will help students develop into responsible, active community members.

Integrating environmental ethics into your curriculum can be done on multiple levels. You may decide to start with something as simple as picking up schoolyard litter and discussing student reactions to having to pick up the litter of others. Examining issues in the community that

involve natural resources is another way to model a process of exploring, researching, and formulating an opinion on current topics.

If you want to integrate environmental ethics into your classroom in a more systematic way, it may be helpful to use programs that are already well established for this purpose. Both of the following organizations strive to educate about the responsible use of our natural resources. Each website has numerous resources and training workshops available. Becoming trained in either will give you access to additional materials, classroom exercises, and curriculum to assist you in incorporating environmental ethics into your teaching.

- 1) Leave No Trace (<http://www.lnt.org/>): The Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics is an educational, nonprofit organization dedicated to the responsible enjoyment and active stewardship of the outdoors by all people, worldwide.
- 2) Leopold Education Project (<http://www.lep.org/>): The mission of the Leopold Education Project is to create an ecologically literate citizenry so that each individual might develop a personal land ethic. Leopold Education Project has CDs available for purchase including: Lessons in GPS Technology; Connecting Students to Nature; and Exploring the Outdoors with Aldo Leopold.

Another excellent place to start looking at environmental ethics is to investigate environmental quotes that have been recorded over time—this issue has a colorful history! Many prominent (and non-prominent) figures have made statements on the subject of the environment. Politicians, authors, musicians, comedians, religious leaders, and others have taken a stand and expressed their views. On the following pages, you will find a variety of quotes that give a taste of how diverse the topic of environmental ethics can be. You can begin by focusing on one quote or providing a selection and leading students in reflecting, discussing, or researching an aspect of environmental ethics. A quote could be an introduction to a lesson activity, the focus of an investigation, or used as a reflection at the conclusion of a unit to help assess learning.

## Resources

<http://www.answers.com/topic/environmental-ethics>

<http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Environ/Enviroethics.htm>

<http://www.myfootprint.org> - Determine your own biological footprint!

<http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9217/ethics.htm> - Environmental Ethics and School Activities

<http://scialert.net/fulltext/?doi=rjes.2011.77.81&org=10> - Study infusing ethics into content

[http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/wiki/Main_Page) - Using books to teach ethics

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001800/180014e.pdf> - UNESCO on Environmental

Ethics

<http://lnt.org/programs/peak.php> - Leave No Trace PEAK Program activities

<http://www.terracycle.net/> - Upcycling (Groups earn money by saving unrecyclable items and selling them to Terracycle where they are made into products.)

<http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Environ/Enviroethics.htm>

<http://www.cep.unt.edu/ISEE.html> - International Society for Environmental Ethics

<http://www.cep.unt.edu/enethics.html> - Environmental ethics online journal. Subscription basis

<http://www.enviroliteracy.org/index.php> - Environmental Literacy Council

<http://www.ecostudies.org/syefest/> - Schoolyard Ecology Leader's Handbook

<http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/index.htm> Teaching and learning for a sustainable future including information and activities based on the Earth Charter

## Environmental Quotes

Quotes from “The Quote Garden” (<http://www.quote garden.com/environment.html>); “Cornerstones” from the May 2008 issue of *The Progressive Farmer*; and various other people and sources.

-  To make a prairie it takes one clover and a bee and reverie.  
- Emily Dickinson
-  There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need but not for man's greed.  
- Mohandas K. Gandhi
-  There's so much pollution in the air now that if it weren't for our lungs there'd be no place to put it all.  
- Robert Orben
-  It wasn't the Exxon Valdez captain's driving that caused the Alaskan oil spill. It was yours.  
- Greenpeace advertisement, *New York Times*, 25 February 1990
-  Modern technology, Owes ecology, An apology.  
- Alan M. Eddison
-  Nature provides a free lunch, but only if we control our appetites.  
- William Ruckelshaus, *Business Week*, 18 June 1990
-  Because we don't think about future generations, they will never forget us.  
- Henrik Tikkanen
-  I think the environment should be put in the category of our national security. Defense of our resources is just as important as defense abroad. Otherwise what is there to defend?  
- Robert Redford, Yosemite National Park dedication, 1985
-  We never know the worth of water till the well is dry.  
- Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia*, 1732
-  We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.  
- Native American Proverb
-  They kill good trees to put out bad newspapers.  
- James G. Watt, quoted in *Newsweek*, 8 March 1982
-  Economic advance is not the same thing as human progress.  
- John Clapham, *A Concise Economic History of Britain*, 1957
-  The use of solar energy has not been opened up because the oil industry does not own the sun.  
- Ralph Nader, quoted in Linda Botts, ed., *Loose Talk*, 1980

- 🌳 The packaging for a microwavable "microwave" dinner is programmed for a shelf life of maybe six months, a cook time of two minutes and a landfill dead-time of centuries.

- David Wann, *Buzzworm*, November 1990
- 🌳 Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out the trees, then names the streets after them.

- Bill Vaughn
- 🌳 If civilization has risen from the Stone Age, it can rise again from the Wastepaper Age.

- Jacques Barzun, *The House of Intellect*, 1959
- 🌳 I would feel more optimistic about a bright future for man if he spent less time proving that he can outwit Nature and more time tasting her sweetness and respecting her seniority.

- Elwyn Brooks White, *Essays of E.B. White*, 1977
- 🌳 Oh Beautiful for smoggy skies, insecticided grain,  
For strip-mined mountain's majesty above the asphalt plain.  
America, America, man sheds his waste on thee,  
And hides the pines with billboard signs, from sea to oily sea.

- George Carlin
- 🌳 Why do people give each other flowers? To celebrate various important occasions, they're killing living creatures? Why restrict it to plants? "Sweetheart, let's make up. Have this deceased squirrel."

- Jerry Seinfeld
- 🌳 Till now man has been up against Nature; from now on he will be up against his own nature.

- Dennis Gabor, *Inventing the Future*, 1964
- 🌳 When we heal the earth, we heal ourselves.

- David Orr
- 🌳 We cannot command Nature except by obeying her.

- Francis Bacon
- 🌳 It is imperative to maintain portions of the wilderness untouched so that a tree will rot where it falls, a waterfall will pour its curve without generating electricity, a trumpeter swan may float on uncontaminated water - and moderns may at least see what their ancestors knew in their nerves and blood.

- Bernand De Voto, *Fortune*, June 1947
- 🌳 Take care of the earth and she will take care of you.

- Author Unknown
- 🌳 Opie, you haven't finished your milk. We can't put it back in the cow, you know.

- Aunt Bee Taylor, *The Andy Griffith Show*

-  The activist is not the man who says the river is dirty. The activist is the man who cleans up the river.
  - Ross Perot
-  We say we love flowers, yet we pluck them. We say we love trees, yet we cut them down. And people still wonder why some are afraid when told they are loved.
  - Author Unknown
-  Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.
  - Chief Seattle, 1855
-  When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.
  - John Muir
-  Man must feel the earth to know himself and recognize his values.....
  - Charles A. Lindbergh, *Reader's Digest*, July 1972
-  The old Lakota was wise. He knew that man's heart away from nature becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too.
  - Chief Luther Standing Bear
-  The magnificence of mountains, the serenity of nature - nothing is safe from the idiot marks of man's passing.
  - Loudon Wainwright
-  Dig a trench through a landfill and you will see layers of phone books like geographical strata or layers of cake....
  - William Rathje, *The Economist*, 8 September 1990
-  It is a curious situation that the sea, from which life first arose, should now be threatened by the activities of one form of that life.
  - Rachel Carson
-  Man is a complex being: he makes deserts bloom - and lakes die.
  - Gil Stern
-  Time and space - time to be alone, space to move about - these may well become the great scarcities of tomorrow.
  - Edwin Way Teale, *Autumn Across America*, 1956
-  The rose has thorns only for those who would gather it.
  - Chinese Proverb

-  When you use a manual push mower, you're "cutting" down on pollution and the only thing in danger of running out of gas is you!

  - Grey Livingston
  
-  If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos.

  - Edward O. Wilson
  
-  The human race will be the cancer of the planet.

  - Julian Huxley, attributed
  
-  Our children may save us if they are taught to care properly for the planet; but if not, it may be back to the Ice Age or the caves from where we first emerged. Then we'll have to view the universe above from a cold, dark place. No more jet skis, nuclear weapons, plastic crap, broken pay phones, drugs, cars, waffle irons, or television. Come to think of it, that might not be a bad idea.

  - Jimmy Buffet, *Mother Earth News*, March-April 1990
  
-  The struggle to save the global environment is in one way much more difficult than the struggle to vanquish Hitler, for this time the war is with ourselves. We are the enemy, just as we have only ourselves as allies.

  - Al Gore
  
-  Give a man a fish, and he can eat for a day. But teach a man how to fish, and he'll be dead of mercury poisoning inside of three years.

  - Charles Haas
  
-  You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of your grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

  - Native American Wisdom
  
-  There is hope if people will begin to awaken that spiritual part of themselves, that heartfelt knowledge that we are caretakers of this planet.

  - Brooke Medicine Eagle
  
-  When the soil disappears, the soul disappears.

  - Ymber Delecto
  
-  Those who wish to pet and baby wild animals "love" them. But those who respect their natures and wish to let them live normal lives, love them more.

  - Edwin Way Teale, *Circle of the Seasons*, 1953
  
-  To live a pure unselfish life, one must count nothing as one's own in the midst of abundance.

  - Buddha

- 🌳 We have always had reluctance to see a tract of land which is empty of men as anything but a void. The "waste howling wilderness" of Deuteronomy is typical. The Oxford Dictionary defines wilderness as wild or uncultivated land which is occupied "only" by wild animals. Places not used by us are "wastes." Areas not occupied by us are "desolate." Could the desolation be in the soul of man?

- John A. Livingston, in Borden Spears, ed., *Wilderness Canada*, 1970
- 🌳 Ironically, rural America has become viewed by a growing number of Americans as having a higher [quality of life] not because of what it has, but rather because of what it does not have!

- Don A. Dillman
- 🌳 You go into a community and they will vote 80 percent to 20 percent in favor of a tougher Clean Air Act, but if you ask them to devote 20 minutes a year to having their car emissions inspected, they will vote 80 to 20 against it. We are a long way in this country from taking individual responsibility for the environmental problem.

- William Ruckelshaus, former EPA administrator, *New York Times*, 30 November 1988
- 🌳 In an underdeveloped country, don't drink the water; in a developed country, don't breathe the air.

- *Changing Times* magazine
- 🌳 If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall.

- Nadine Stair
- 🌳 We are also the only species that, when it chooses to do so, will go to great effort to save what it might destroy.

- Wallace Stegner
- 🌳 Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land.

- Aldo Leopold
- 🌳 We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.

- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*
- 🌳 In the end, we conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.

- Baba Dioum

**U.S. Presidents:** Integration Ideas: Analyze presidential quotes as part of a study of specific presidents and compare to environmental policies of that presidency. Compare environmental quotes of presidents and then create a list of achievement for their terms. Compare and contrast ideas, legislation, how monies were allocated.

- 🌳 I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use our natural resources. But I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob by wasteful use, the generations that come after us.

- Theodore Roosevelt

 It is our task in our time and in our generation to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours.

- John F. Kennedy

 The days a man spends fishing or spends hunting should not be deducted from the time that he's on earth. In other words, if I fish today, that should be added to the amount of time I get to live. That's the way I look at recreation. That's why I'll be a big conservation, environmental President, because I plan to fish and hunt as much as I possibly can.

- George H.W. Bush, quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, 30 December 1988