

## Lesson 1: Interconnection and Sustainability

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### Key Learning Goals

By the end of the Lesson, you will:

- Know about the four main ideologies in environmental ethics.
- Understand what sustainability is and how it developed as a concept.



Retrieve from: <http://www.gizmodo.com.au/2013/08/an-image-of-earth-made-from-1400-photos-of-people-waving-at-space/>

### Introduction

Can you think of a time in your own life when you've had to be a steward of something?

Have you ever stopped to think about that question? Stewardship is probably a word you've heard used many times, but do you really know what it means? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Stewardship as "*the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care.*" In other words, it means looking after the things that have been given to you. One of the most important things we've all been given is our home—the Earth.

Before you go any further in this Lesson, take a look at the chart below which shows many of the most popular topics regarding environmental stewardship. In the middle columns, use a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being very important, 5 being not important at all) to rank how you think these issues affect daily life in *your* family. After the Lesson, come back and list which viewpoints on the earth and its resources you think are connected to that topic, and re-rank the topics to see if your opinion has changed.

Stewardship Topic	How much does it affect my Family?	Ethical Viewpoint Connected to it?
Groundwater Pollution		
Deforestation		
Mass Transit/Pedestrian friendly cities		
Fracking		
Creating National Parks and Wildlife Reserves		
Vegetarianism and Responsible Eating		
Strip Mining		

## Environmental Ethics

### *Interconnectivity*

All living things interact with and alter their environment. Whether it is plants, animals, or even microscopic life forms, everything that is alive affects, and is effected by, its environment. Human beings are no different, although unlike any other creature, our actions have the ability to drastically alter the world and potentially damage the **interconnectivity** between living things and their environment. This can happen in many different ways, but the most common is by damaging the ecosystems through the choices we make—by the things we do or don't do.

### *Priorities and Ethics*

Since everyone is dependent on the earth and its ecosystem for life, you might think that protecting the environment would be the highest priority for people all around the world. However, this isn't the case. There are a variety of different viewpoints on how to treat the planet and the resources it provides. Some opinions are driven by a desire for money and wealth, while

others view the earth as something to be preserved. You are probably familiar with many of these ideas already, even if you don't know the proper names used to describe them:

- **Utilitarian:** the belief that all of the earth's resources (plants, animals, minerals, etc.) are to be used to make our lives better.
- **Conservation:** the belief that certain places, or some of the earth's resources, should be left alone and protected.
- **Libertarianism:** all living things (including humans) are equally important and should be treated with the same respect.
- **Ecological:** all things are equal and connected. Those connections are the most important part of life, and should be protected.

These are only some of the many views that exist, but they are enough to show you how diverse of opinions there are. Collectively, the discussion about how humans, other life forms, and the earth should interact is called **environmental ethics**, and it continues to grow and produce new ideas.

<b>Stop and Think:</b> What are the four main views on how to treat our planet and its resources?
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## **Sustainability**

### *The Road to Sustainability*

Another popular term in use today is **sustainability**, and it often refers to finding the middle ground between using resources to better our lives (utilitarianism) and respecting the connections between all living things (ecology). However, for a long time sustainability was viewed as an inconvenience, as it seemed to get in the way of humanity progressing forward. In fact, most people didn't think it was possible for us to hurt the earth at all, which meant there was no need to think about the long term effects of our actions.

### *Early Sustainability*

That all began to change in the late 1990's though, as scientists began to study and report on a new phenomenon known as **global warming**. In the early years this meant paying attention to holes in the ozone layer around the north and south poles, while wondering if this could lead to a rise in air temperature and, potentially, flooding from melting ice caps. Over time, as more data

was collected, the term global warming was gradually replaced by **climate change**, as the predicted effects started to encompass more than rising temperatures.

### *Modern Sustainability*

Things finally started coming to a head in 2009, when over 2,500 leading scientists from around the world met in Copenhagen, Denmark and laid out a list of the effects that climate change would cause if changes were not made. As a result, many countries started to wonder what they could do to help in the effort against climate change, while still ensuring they met the needs and demands of their citizens. The conclusion that most of them arrived at was that resources should be used in a more responsible manner. In other words, **sustainability**.

<b>Stop and Think:</b> Explain the problem in the 1990's that first drew attention to global warming.
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### *Views on Sustainability*

Not everyone was happy with this shift in thinking, and the struggle to promote environmental sustainability continues to this day. This is partly due to the fact that everyone has their own way of viewing the world around them, which is shaped by a number of factors including their family background, their own experiences, and their culture. As a result, there can be many different opinions on how to best use the earth and its resources, or on the best *kinds* of sustainable practices.

As you might guess, two of the strongest influences on how people view sustainability would be the way they were raised, and the values of their families and culture. These factors can have a big effect on the way resources are used, how other life forms are treated, and even on the value placed on other people. As a result, environmental sustainability often becomes tied together with larger questions of social justice and ensuring that all people have equal access to the wealth and resources of the planet.

### **Conclusion**

The question of how to use the earth and its resources is very large, and there are many different views on what the answer should be. As you have seen, some people believe in using resources without restraint, while others think protecting the connection between people and the planet should be the most important consideration. Still, others fall somewhere in the middle! However, all groups are beginning to realize that only through sustainable practices can the needs of today *and* tomorrow be met.

**Did You Know?** Sustainable choices can have a big effect! For example, an energy-smart clothes washer can save more water in one year than one person drinks in an entire lifetime.

## Quiz: Unit 1 Lesson 1

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For each of the following question, select the correct answer.

- 1) In the 1990s, holes in the \_\_\_\_\_ first drew attention to Global Warming? (Polar Ice Caps; **Ozone Layer**; Andes Mountains; Ocean Reefs)
- 2) The belief that certain sections of the earth should be preserved or set aside is known as? (Utilitarianism; Ecology; Libertarianism; **Conservation**)
- 3) Where did leading scientists meet in 2009 to lay out the effects of Climate Change? (Switzerland; Detroit; **Denmark**; Sweden)
- 4) Collectively, the discussion on how the earth and its resources should be used is called? (**Environmental Ethics**; Environmental Stewardship; Environmental Sustainability; Environmentalism)
- 5) The belief that the connections between people, life forms, and the planet are the most important considerations is known as? (Utilitarianism; **Ecology**; Libertarianism; Conservation)
- 6) Using resources in a way that leaves enough for the future is called? (Storing; **Sustainability**; Stockpiling; Investing)
- 7) Pollution causing rising temperatures is known as? (Climate Change; Greenhouse Gases; Thermalization; **Global Warming**)
- 8) The belief that all living things are equal and should be treated with the same respect is called? (Utilitarianism; Ecology; **Libertarianism**; Conservation)
- 9) What are two of the strongest influences on how a person views sustainability? (**The way they were raised/The values of their Family and Community**; What they see on TV/The way they were raised; Social Media/What they see on TV; The way they were raised/Social Media)
- 10) The most common way to damage the interconnectivity between people and the world is? (Natural Disasters; Animal Attacks; **People's Choices**; War)
- 11) The belief that all the earth's resources are to be used to make our lives better is known as? (**Utilitarianism**; Ecology; Libertarianism; Conservation)

# Assignment: Unit 1 Lesson 1

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Answer each of the following questions.

- 1) List and briefly describe the four main ideologies in environmental ethics and what they mean. (4 Marks)
- 2) In two paragraphs, explain the difference between global warming and climate change (6 marks)
- 3) Select a culture (other than your own), and in two paragraphs explain how that culture views the relationship between living organisms and their ecosystems, and the role of humans in that relationship. (10 marks)
- 4) In two paragraphs, explain your own personal views on how you (and humans as a whole) are connected to the environment. Be sure to explain how you think your culture, family, or upbringing have played a part in the development of these views. (10 marks)
- 5) Use the Internet to locate three stories (one for each category) about an environmental sustainability problem that occurred within each of the following: your home town/city, your province, and within Canada. Provide the links to your stories. (3 marks)
- 6) Select one of the stories you found for question #5, and in a one-page essay, develop and defend a position or course of action to solve the problem using environmentally sustainable practices. Your answer must be written in proper essay format (introduction, body/supporting paragraphs, and conclusion). (25 marks)

Total Marks: /58