

Waterdrops

Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink



Complexity



8-13 years



60 minutes



4-30



Environment



Migration



Democratic
Citizenship

Type of activity

Experiential learning, prioritising, discussion

Overview

Children decide how they can use water so that they do not waste it. They discuss the importance of personal action in order to preserve one of the most important resources for the environment.

Objectives

- To raise awareness of the need to use natural resources in a sustainable way
- To discuss ways of looking after water supplies and the environment in general
- To help children become aware of their rights
- To encourage individual action for the sustainable use of resources, including water saving

Preparation

Prepare sets of six glasses for each small group of children. The glasses in each set should be labelled: Drinking, Cooking, Washing yourself, Washing Clothes, Flushing the toilet, Other.

Fill 1-litre bottles with water: you will need one bottle for each small group.

Materials

- A 1-litre bottle for each small group of children
- 6 glasses for each small group of children
- Flipchart or blackboard
- Paper and pens

Instructions

1. Ask the children to think of as many reasons as possible why water is important (e.g. for plants, animals, human beings, industry, agriculture, recreation), and introduce the idea of water conservation, asking questions such as these:
 - Where can you find water on Earth? (the ocean, ice caps, rivers, etc.)
 - How much of the water on Earth can be used as drinking water? (Tell them that 97% of all water is to be found in the oceans; 2% is held in the ice caps, and only 1% of the Earth's water is fresh water available for drinking)
 - What would life on Earth be like without water? What if there was less water?
 - Is fresh water equally available everywhere on Earth?
 - What do you think about fresh water in the future? Will the climate crisis have an impact on the amount of fresh water that will be available?

2. Brainstorm the different ways that children use water every day (e.g. for cooking, for having a bath or shower, flushing the toilet, washing clothes) and list these on a board or flipchart paper. Then ask them to guess how much water they normally use in a day. Tell them that in Europe, the average is approximately 135 litres/day; in North America, the average is about 420 litres/day; in Africa, the average is about 20 litres/day. According to the UN, the “average” person needs between 20 to 50 litres/day.
3. Divide the participants into small groups of four or five. Explain that this activity will challenge them to be more careful about looking after the scarce water resources on earth. Give each group a bottle of water and ask them to imagine that this represents all the water that one person has for a day. The group must decide how to divide it up – and they must be careful not to waste it!
4. Remind children of the list they made in Step 2 of the ways they use water. Give each group a set of six labelled glasses – and tell them that the ‘Other’ category can include things like gardening, cleaning the house, and so on. Ask them to discuss in their groups how they want to divide up their water into each of the categories. They should pour the water from their bottle into the six glasses, trying to make sure that they will be able to fulfil their daily needs. Ask them to do this task quickly. When they have finished, allow a little time for children to look at the distributions of other groups.
5. Now tell them that an emergency caused by climate change has arisen: an extreme drought has caused rivers to dry up and crop failures, and wildfires are spreading throughout the region. The fire services and farmers say they have no more water to deal with the problems. They appeal for help!
6. Ask children to return to their groups and give each group a copy of the ‘Waterdrop’. They need to find ways of saving the water they have allocated to the six different categories, and each method should be written onto the ‘Waterdrop’. Ask for a few ideas to check their understanding, and then give the groups some time to complete the task.
7. Bring the groups back together and ask each to report briefly on a few of the ideas they have had. Remind them that there are many other demands on water from the community, which need to be satisfied out of the water we have available. If time allows, ask for a few more suggestions.
8. At the end of the activity, pin up the ‘Waterdrops’ around the room, so that they are available for the children to look at later.

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the activity using questions such as these:
 - Did you enjoy this activity?
 - Were there any disagreements in your group?
 - Were you surprised by how many things we use water for?
 - Was it difficult to find ways of saving water? Where do you think we waste water most?
 - Which ideas from other groups did you like?
2. Discuss the topic of water conservation:
 - Why is it important to save water?
 - What happens when people do not have access to enough water for their needs?
 - Do you know where the water used by our neighbourhood comes from?
 - How could you make savings in the water you use in your daily life? Do you think you will try to do this?
 - Why does the climate crisis make it more important than ever that we save water?

3. Relate the activity to human rights by asking questions such as these:
 - Water is essential for life and survival. What are some of the other natural resources which play a key role in life and survival?
 - According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to clean water and a clean environment. Do all children have access to these resources? What happens if the resources are available but not of good quality?
 - Who is responsible for making sure these resources are available, and of good quality?
 - What can we do to help those who are most affected by the climate crisis?
4. At the end of the debriefing, ask the children to look back at their 'Waterdrops' and add any other ideas on how to save water and how to use it in their environment. Display the 'Waterdrops' somewhere in the room so that the children can refer to them in the future.

Suggestions for follow-up

The activity 'What a Wonderful World' also engages children in looking more deeply into what they understand by a healthy and safe environment. 'Reading the Label' can be used to go more deeply into the question of wasting natural resources and spoiling the environment.

Take the approach used in this activity to consider other essential resources and how they affect children's lives (e.g. clean air, safe and wholesome food, electricity, gas or oil). Similarly, consider how children themselves can conserve these resources (e.g. recycling, using different bins for different types of rubbish, using public transport, using renewable resources, etc.).

Learn more about the problem of water (e.g. from films, documentaries, myths and folk tales, newspaper articles). Reinforce the links between individual action, water saving and the climate crises, and how we can protect rights to other natural resources for people across the globe.

For older children, the short animation 'Abuela Grillo', adapted from a Bolivian myth, can be used as the beginning of a discussion about water as a right for all.

Ideas for action

Develop some group action plans for saving water. Children can measure approximately how much water they use in one day and note this down over the course of a week. Come back to the discussion after a week or so, to see if they found it hard to save water, and talk about why it is useful to do so. Before doing this, you should contact the children's parents or other adults in order to prepare them for the water-saving week.

Play 'Pollution Patrol' with the children. If there is a small pond or river near the school, take a closer look at it. Check the rubbish in the water and on the banks. Find out how people use this water, or where it goes.

Take a walk around the neighbourhood with the children and identify how rubbish is collected – and where it is not collected. Find out with the children how rubbish is processed and talk about why it is important to have a clean environment.

Build on the children's ideas for changing their behaviour towards natural resources, for example, food, water, electricity, gas, and so on. Support them in understanding that their personal actions can have an impact globally, and that individual change can make a difference.

Tips for the facilitator

The children will need to have a basic understanding of the water cycle in order to do and understand this activity. Explain the water cycle first if they have not already been introduced to the concept previously.

Remind children that the way we look after natural resources affects the human rights and right to survival not just of ourselves, but also of others in the community and even around the world.

When the children are discussing the common resource, prompt them, if they do not realise it, to think about public buildings and services which use water. For example, the construction industry requires large amounts of water, so public housing and public buildings such as schools will have to be built out of the 'common resource'. Medical services, green public spaces, street cleaning and so on are other public resources which will need to be provided for out of this resource.

Adaptations

For younger children, you could fill in the handout of the 'Waterdrop' instead of asking the children to do this.

With older children, expand the discussion to include general rights to resources, sustainable development, the climate crisis and the right to life. Use questions such as these:

- What can be done to respect everyone's right to water and right to other natural resources?
- Which other natural resources are limited?
- In light of the climate crisis, what can be done to allow future generations to live in a world where they have access to essential natural resources?

Further information

A trip with drip – the water drop is a workbook containing basic information and several 'learning-by-doing' activities on various aspects of water. It includes information and practical tools for studying the origin of water, the amount of water used by human beings, the way people use water for agricultural, industrial and domestic use, and the problem of water pollution. This is available at the site of the United Nations Environment Programme (www.unep.org).

The 'Water Footprint Network' contains many useful resources, including statistics and interactive tools on water footprints: <http://waterfootprint.org>



Handout

A water drop

