

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

CLIMATE CHANGE



'Weeks' or 'Months' with a special focus give an opportunity we may not usually have in the tight squeeze of school life to stand back from the usual pressures and take time out to look at a particular issue or aspect of existence. They can give us an impetus or an excuse (if one is needed!) to do something we could not usually do.

Climate Week provides golden opportunities to consider the effect human beings have on the environment.

A cross curricular event

Climate Week provides a fantastic opportunity to develop a cross-curricular project which could involve most if not all subject areas. If planned well in advance, the impact could be enormous and the benefits and outcomes lasting far longer than the project itself. Talk to colleagues in maths, science, design and food technologies, English and other areas about what could be achieved.

Find a large display area in the school where thought provoking posters, photographs, reflective quotations, statistics about climate change, and pupils responses could be seen by everyone, including visitors. Or why not see if your local library would host the display?

There are so many challenging religious and non-religious statements and quotations about how humankind interacts with the planet and the consequences of these interactions. Examples include:

- *There is a sufficiency in the world for man's need but not for man's greed.* Mohandas K. Gandhi
- *We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.*
Native American Proverb
- *There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are all crew.* Marshall McLuhan

- *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
- *When you defile the pleasant streams
And the wild bird's abiding place,
You massacre a million dreams
And cast your spittle in God's face.* John Drinkwater

Or use a saying like, 'It costs the earth!' in its literal sense and explore what that might mean.

Provide some quotations as a starting point and encourage pupils to research others for themselves or to write their own. Use these to investigate religious teachings and the actions of believers. The Alliance of Religions and Conservation website has a Faiths and Ecology section: http://www.arcworld.org/arc_and_the_faiths.asp. This contains beliefs, teachings, quotations and projects and responses of eleven religions to ecological and environmental issues. Teachings or quotations from religious texts could be investigated alongside some of the statements and agreements to emerge from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change <http://unfccc.int/2860.php> held in Cancun in December 2010. The Climate Week website provides a page linking to faith websites backing the week: <http://www.climateweek.com/supporters/find-your-sector/religions/>

Focus on Food

In many faiths, gratitude for the gift of food is significant. Climate Week can provide an occasion to make a link between people putting their religious beliefs into action and their understanding of the role food choices play in contributing to climate change. Examples could include the impact of buying foods with high



'food miles' or wasting food and throwing it away. Up to 30% of an individual's carbon footprint comes from food. There are various pupil-friendly carbon footprint calculators on the web. http://www.planet-positive.org/how_2_calculator.php This example is for primary age pupils and once completed enables them to see their carbon footprint equivalent in easy to understand terms. The REEP website (see page 4) has another calculator.

Martin Palmer, founder of the Religions and Conservation Alliance, said that 'Choosing planet friendly food is the most important everyday way for people to reduce their environmental impact'. Do a 'Planet friendly food audit' for a local religious community, thinking about any ways the life of that community involves food and drink choices (e.g. refreshments after services for events that happen there, or special occasions such as festivals). What scope is there for changing behaviour in a positive way? The Faith in Food initiative at <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=520> is described as 'Faith in Food is about people of faith honouring their values in the food they eat.' How might people act differently if they do this?

Have a discussion on why food and drink are often such an important part of religious and non religious celebrations. Should they be? Could they be changed in any way to be more planet friendly? Use a religious calendar of holy days and festivals to investigate the symbolism and importance of food in religion and culture.

Explore blessings and graces said, actions or gestures made before or after eating food in different religions and how these reflect the beliefs and teachings of that faith. For some religious communities, the precious nature of food means that is eaten in silence. Consider having a silent meal and ask participants to write a poem or reflect on the experience of concentrating on the aromas, textures and flavours.

Climate Change and Social Justice

Explore the links people make in some religious traditions between climate change and social justice. See, for example, the statement by the

Christian Muslim Youth Forum at <http://www.cmyf.org/christian-muslim-youth-statement-on-climate-change.html>. Or, listen to this short podcast which describes the work done by the Faith and Climate Change group in Birmingham. <http://podnosh.com/blog/2009/10/20/faith-and-climate-change-a-new-podcast-from-the-grassroots-channel/>

Visit a local Fair Trade shop or stall or invite an organiser into school to answer questions about why they work for this and why they think there are links between climate change and social justice.

Trees

Put 'trees' into the search box of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation website <http://www.arcworld.org/> and you will find a whole variety of resources ranging from prayers about forests, religious tree conservation projects and information on living churchyards. Consider researching the Jewish festival of Tu b'Shevat (the New Year of trees) and the reasons why trees are so valued in Jewish teaching (e.g. even in time of war, the destruction of trees is forbidden). There are specific teachings in the Torah which forbid the wanton destruction of nature. This has a new relevance in a time of concern about climate change.

Find out about tree planting schemes in other religious and belief traditions (for example, in connection with carbon offsetting). In 1999, British Sikhs planted a special woodland on the outskirts of Nottingham to mark the 300th anniversary of *Vaiskakh* (the fellowship of baptised Sikhs). It is known as the Khalsa Wood. Oak saplings were chosen because the Sikh community wanted to have something which future generations into the 22nd century and beyond could visit. Since the original planting, fruit trees have now also been planted.

Consider holding a tree planting ceremony. The Woodland Trust www.woodlandtrust.org.uk is one organisation that helps with this in local contexts. A tree can be symbolic



and used as a living focus or memorial of a person or event. At the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, for example, a tree planted in memory of Anne Frank has all its blossoms removed each year on 12th June, Anne's birthday.

With older pupils, look at the evidence of the effectiveness of carbon offsetting and situations in which it is or is not an effective response to climate change.

Many GCSE courses RS include a unit on 'Religion and the Environment'. The A Rocha website <http://www.arocha.org/gb-en/index.html> has materials to support this theme, with a new DVD due out in February 2011. It also many other resources for primary and secondary.

Going Green

In November 2009 the first plans for Generational Change were launched by faiths at Windsor Castle. Each produced a long term environmental plan (on average between 7 and 10 years). <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectId=497>

These plans show each faith's commitment to sustainable action and include such aspects as: buildings, celebrations, education, endangered animals, fasting, or sacred land. <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectId=501>

Two examples are: *Greening the Hajj*, a project initiated by Indonesian Muslims. It includes a ban on plastic bottles at Hajj sites and provides workshops about the link between environmental stewardship and the teaching of Islam. *Shrinking the Footprint* is the the Church of England's flagship programme for tackling climate change and is looking at such things as using renewable energy and green electricity in churches, conserving water and reducing the amount of waste.

An activity during Climate Week could be to investigate a religious ceremony, practice or event and find out what believers are doing to reduce its climate change impact.



Stewardship and Repair

There is a belief In Judaism that people are guardians of the world for the sake of future generations and that irreparable environmental damage must be avoided. One example in the Old Testament describes how each seventh year, the land should be given a Sabbath, a year when it can rest and regenerate. The Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, includes environmental as well as social action.

In Islam, *khalifa*, stewardship or trusteeship, means that man is a 'vice-regent' and carries joint responsibility for caring for Allah's earthly creations. Unity, trusteeship and accountability, *tawheed*, *khalifa* and *akhirah*, the three central concepts of Islam, are also the pillars of the environmental trusteeship.

Human beings have made a terrible mess of the planet we live on. Questions which could be explored with pupils might include: How can we repair the world? If human beings are 'vice-regents' in caring for the planet, what does that mean in terms of the way we behave? How can we lead lives more in harmony with nature? With the population explosion, is it possible for land to have a Sabbath?

Work with other classes, departments or a partner school to devise a school charter for the year ahead of 5 achievable things the school could contribute towards 'repairing the world' at a local, national or global level.

Devise a display or presentation: 'The Re-Creation of the Earth'. You could use the Judaeo-Christian account of creation as a starting point to identify 7 steps to re-create the earth repairing the damage done by humankind.

Explore the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain concept of *ahimsa* - the teaching promoting non-violence toward all living beings. *Ahimsa* encourages compassion for all life, human and non-human. How does this teaching impact positively on repairing the earth or improving sustainability? Invite a member from one of these three faiths to talk about the effect practising *ahimsa* has on the environment. Belief in *ahimsa* leads many Buddhists, Hindus and Jains to be vegetarians. During Climate Week consider having a vegetarian lunch day in school. (And if successful, have a veggie lunch once a month, and eventually perhaps even once a week.)

The World in the Classroom

Find out when Earth Hour will take place <http://www.earthhour.org/Homepage.aspx?intro=no>. This campaign asks everyone to take personal responsibility for their impact on the planet and to make changes to achieve sustainability. During Earth Hour, people around the world are asked to switch off their lights. Perhaps designate a particular day of the week close to this date and make an effort to ensure all non-essential lighting is turned off. Earth Hour does not cost anything and can be used as a celebration of the planet and a commitment to environmentally sustainable action.

The Gaia Foundation <http://www.gaiafoundation.org/> has many useful resources including information on the preservation of sacred sites to indigenous peoples, climate change resilience, multimedia resources and Earth Jurisprudence (Law). Earth Law recognises the Earth as the primary source of law and sets human law in a context which is wider than humanity itself. During Climate Week, devise a series of 10 Earth Commandments which give rights and protection to all living creatures in the natural world.

Climate change and other environmental issues can easily be brought into the classroom through many web based programs. Version 6 of Google Earth has a layer called 'Global Awareness'. Within this layer, there are a series of sub-categories, e.g. Fair Trade Certified or UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) Atlas of our Changing Environment. Clicking on one of these links reveals icons for that category around the world. Clicking on an icon opens up an information panel. An example in the UNICEF Water and Sanitation category is: 'Ghana: Water without worms'. This describes how UNICEF and the Dutch soccer club Feyenoord are working intensively together to protect Ghanaian children against the dangers of infected water.

Environmental Charities

Put the name of a religion and 'environmental charities' into a search engine and you will find that there are a vast number. REEP (The Religious Education and Environment Programme) contains some useful links to get you started. <http://www.reep.org/resources/weblinks.php>

www.reep.org/resources/weblinks.php. This site also provides a number of environmental resources for both primary and secondary. Study a particular theme e.g. trees, water, food waste, or transport and its positive or negative effect on climate change, then investigate how religious charities are taking action.

Examples of two religious environmental charities are: EkoSikh <http://ecosikh.org>, a new organisation set up as a response to the ecological crisis. The EcoSikh Seed Plan (downloadable from the website) is rooted in Sikh eco-theology and provides a model, guidelines and examples of how Sikhs can contribute to sustaining the environment in ways which are supported by Sikh beliefs. It contains a number of theological stories which could be used with primary and secondary pupils.

On March 14th 2010, the Sikh Council on Religion and Education invited Sikhs around the world to celebrate this day as Sikh Environment Day. Already a Sikh holy day - the day on which Guru Har Rai ascended to guruship, appropriate because Guru Har Rai preached that Sikhs must come to the defence of all that is vulnerable and protect the well being of plants and animals.

Big Green Jewish <http://www.biggreenjewish.org/> also provides information and resources on ways in which Jewish people are tackling environmental issues. There are descriptions of festivals and responses to the questions: Is there a link between Judaism and the environment? As Jews, what is our role as global citizens? Should Jewish people consume with a social and ecological conscience? By inserting the name of any religion (or none) in place of Judaism, these are all good questions for the RE classroom.

Making a difference

Climate Week provides a rare and most valuable opportunity for pupils to investigate, participate in, and reflect on what it means to be a global citizen and personally share in the responsibility for the welfare of the planet. Exploring teachings on humanity's duty to the environment and making a personal response could have a lasting impact within your school and local community. It is too good an opportunity to waste.

