



Education and Research: Testing Hypotheses

## **Ocean Council of All Being**

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### **Summary**

This lesson is an experiential activity into the connection between life and environment. The students will specifically focus on the relationship between Pacific ecosystems and people. Students will foster an understanding of the impact of climate change on life in the Pacific through live action role play, embodiment, and ritual. Students choose from a list of characters to learn more about and speak for to present in ritual form at a Council of All Beings. \*This activity is taken from Joanna Macy's Council of All Beings and is catered towards oceanic studies.

Students explore the connection between people and place, cultivate seeing from other perspectives, and embrace indigenous methodologies as means of knowing. They will ponder questions such as how do humans impact the ocean, and how does the ocean create a home for humans, and what impact does rapid climate change have on the ocean's ecological systems. They will be challenged to think outside of anthropocentric perspective to engage problem solving around climate change with new eyes. Students will develop compassion, empathy, coping skills, observational skills, hands on investigation skills, communication skills, and ocean literacy knowledge to become informed global citizens for the earth.

**experiential learning, climate change, ocean, healing**

### **Key Concepts**

- Ocean Literacy: Ocean and human connection
- Holding varying perspective
- Hands on investigation and observation
- Ritual in community

### **Objectives**

- Students will be able to identify human impact on animals, plants, oceans, and islands in the pacific.
  - Students will be able to observe and engage other perspectives of thought.
    - Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the interconnectedness of all things.
  - Students will be able to communicate ideas from the point of view of a non human being.
  - Students will be able to observe how ritual and embodiment effect the body and space they occupy.

## Materials

- <http://creativeactioninstitute.org/assets/CCC-PDFS/Activity-Instructions/CouncilofAllBeingsActivityInstructions.pdf>
- <http://www.joannamacy.net/resources/deepecolgy/111-joanna-macy-council-of-all-beings-july2002.html>
- Pre made information cards for lack of time or younger students
- Drum (optional)
- Masks or stuff to have students make their own (optional)

## Procedure

1. Pass out being cards and masks
2. Give students 5-10 minutes to look over their cards and read them.
3. Prompt students to move around like their life forms. (questions taken from materials section) What shape are you? How much space do you take up? What is your skin or outer surface like? How do you see the world? How do you move or how are you moved by other forces?
4. Invite students to form a circle on the floor and bring everyone into the ritual through taking three deep breaths and asking everyone to arrive in the space.
5. Explain to students that in cultures throughout the world the practice of embodying other animals or beings has been practiced as a sacred way of connecting with the earth and spirits. You could talk about how colonization and the anthropocentric(human centered) way of engagement and separation from nature has slowly created environmental degradation throughout the years.
6. Explain that you will act as the guide for this journey and that after each student has a chance to speak we respond with I hear you \_\_\_\_\_ (name of their being)
7. Have the students rhythmically drum and feel their connection to the earth to transition them into the full embodiment of what their animals or beings will be.
8. Give each being a turn to express themselves by telling the group how climate change is impacting their species with the info from the card or from what they know. They may get up and dance/do a movement/ express themselves however they would like.
9. After each student has a turn we all respond with **I hear you \_\_\_\_\_**(name of their creature)
10. When everyone has had a chance to briefly go, the guide (teacher) will stop and have everyone stand up and look around at each other. You can add in holding hands in a circle and running around if they are getting restless. Give them a minute to really play into their roles.
11. Bring everyone back together and note that the humans are not present even though it seems like their activities have been contributing to changes in the homes and habits of the beings present.

12. Bring in the adults, or take them over to the adults still in character. If you are just doing this activity in your classroom, have some of the beings turn back into humans.
13. The humans sit in the middle of the circle back to back
14. The guide poses the question: What strengths and gifts can we offer the humans now to help aid our world? Go popcorn style.
15. End with an affirmation. We wish for continued learning and healing for the planet as we move towards living in alignment with respecting ourselves and our planet.
16. Begin drumming and dancing and making sounds to “release” the being and come back to human form.

Have students group up into three or four for a short debrief.

18. Discussion questions (taken from the materials section) What did you learn about the environment and climate change? What actions do humans need to take in order to protect and restore our environment? What kinds of powers and strengths can we draw on from the non-human world?

19. Revisit this activity throughout or at the end of a unit around climate change to see how their dialogue and understanding shift throughout the process.

## **Assessment**

- Students will be speaking and telling us about their animal through first person narrative that will demonstrate a grasping of the material.
- They will produce a theatrical character that they will speak from that demonstrates understanding.
- Students will formulate dialogue afterwards in groups to gain further perspective.
- A reflection paper about the experience and what they learned will show what came from the activity.

## **Additional Resources**

*Active Hope:* Joanna Macy

*The Power of Ritual:* Robbie Davis Floyd

*The Healing Wisdom of Africa:* Malidoma Somé

## **Modifications**

- For older students give them time to research their own topics.
- Open up the discussion to landscapes, animals, and plants throughout the world.
- Get creative: modify to fit your students interests (more art, less dancing, more costumes!)
- Do the activity as observers and participants and have the observing students tell the other students what they notice afterwards.