

## **NY/NJ NPFH Activity: Taking Responsibility in Sustainability**

**Grade:** All grade levels

### **Background Info:**

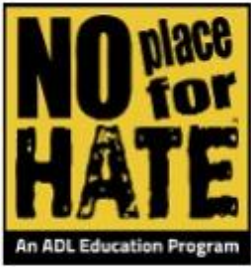
Climate change refers to the changing of our planet's climate due to global warming from greenhouse gases. This extreme change of temperature is largely attributed to human activity—especially through the burning of fossil fuels. As a society and on an individual level, it is our collective responsibility to foster change for a more sustainable environment before irreversible damage ensues.

Weather becoming more dry/wet or warm/cold impacts the severity and frequency of natural disasters, our accessibility to food, the quality of our air, the amount of energy we consume, the availability of clean water, and many more negative impacts ([U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "International Climate Impacts"](#)). When we discuss sustainability and creating a more equitable world, we need to consider how the effects of climate change intersect and disproportionately oppress marginalized communities. For example, indigenous people are greatly impacted by climate change "due to their dependence upon, and close relationship, with the environment and its resources" - [The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#). This example is only through one lens; impact is compounded across identities and through different lived experiences.

The lines of responsibility and action can become blurry, and that is why this work can seem overwhelming. Sustainability does not mean short, extreme changes in behavior such as throwing out all of your plastics. Effective change is about long-term strategic planning.

Climate change and global warming affects everything on Earth which inextricably links it to social justice and our work in bringing an equitable environment for all. As with all social justice issues, it is important to examine and challenge issues at all levels – individual, communal (school community), and societal (laws & corporations).

Please see below for examples of the various ways we can engage in this work and how these actions can look differently based on students' ages.



## Activity:

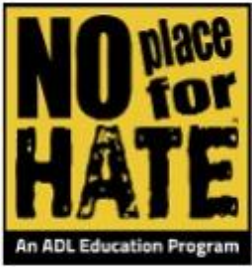
- **All Grade Levels:**

- Create a climate alliance/ group in your school that discusses ways to address climate change and sustainability in your school (and beyond).
- Evaluate your energy saving practices and design a new set of rules to conserve energy:
- Use timed lighting in spaces or switch to energy efficient light sources.
  - Create reusable/recycled reminders to turn off lights, unplug devices, etc.
- Host a community garden that is open to the public and managed by the school community.
  - Offer separate entities for “throwing out.”
  - Alternative idea: Eco Brick : An ecobrick is a plastic bottle packed solid with clean and dry used plastic. Ecobricks are made to a set density to create reusable building blocks that sequester plastic.
- Re-imagine and share alternative resources the school can use to be more sustainable.
  - Re-fillable water bottles.
  - Bamboo (or other non-plastic materials) utensils.
  - Having less meat on the menu.
  - Rely on local farmer’s markets to supply some school produce.
- Host a service day of community clean up.

- **Elementary – Middle School:**

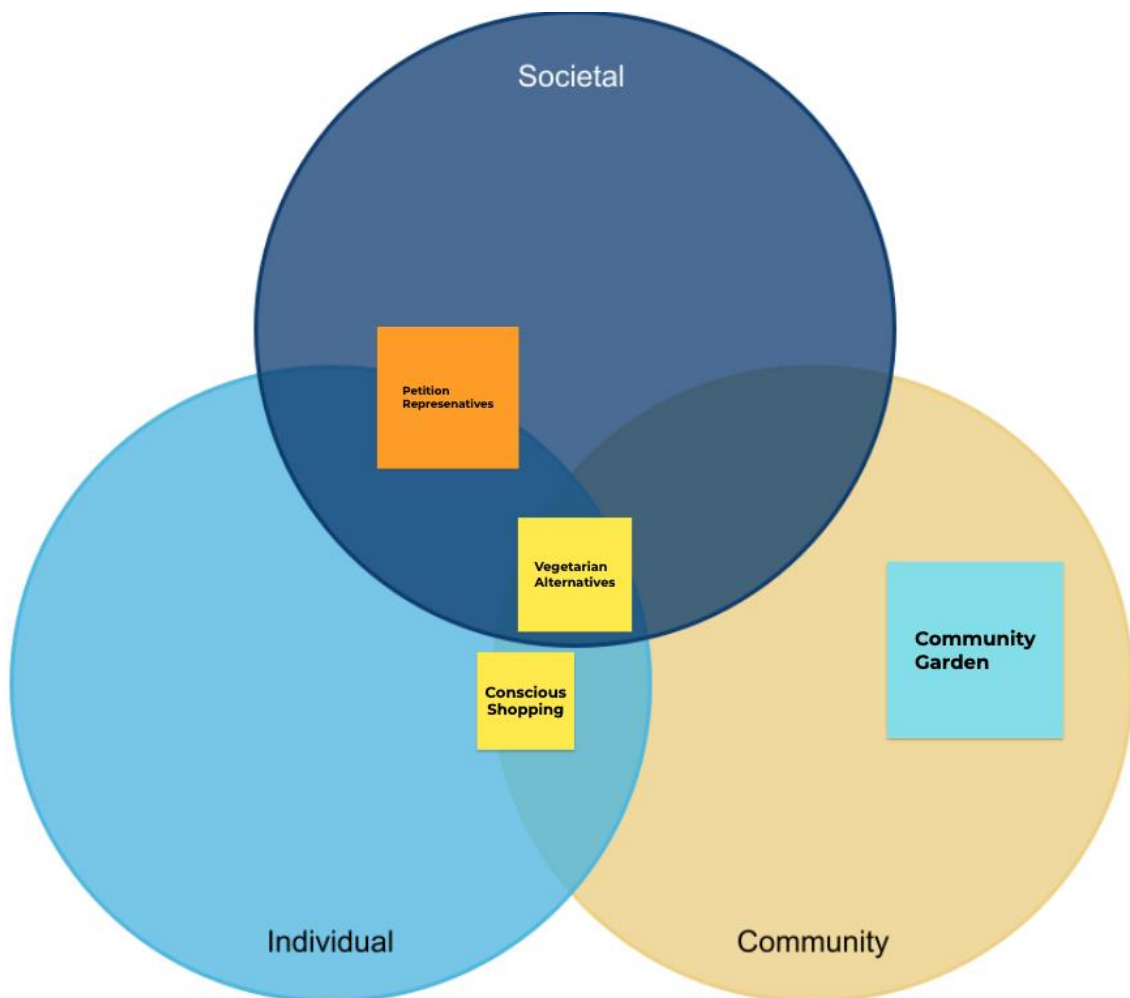
As a group (class, school, district), create your own Venn diagram of ways you can make individual, communal, and societal changes to lead to a more sustainable lifestyle. Use the discussion questions below to help build out your project. Share your findings with your school community and post actionable ways the school community can be more sustainable. See below for an example.

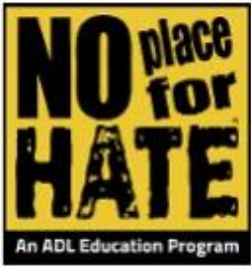
- Where would you put these things on your Venn diagram?
  - Composting & Recycling
  - Conscious shopping & Thrifting
  - Community garden
  - “Meatless Mondays”
  - Farmer’s markets
  - Writing to representatives
  - Use dark backgrounds on electronic devices



\*Virtual adaptation: create your own Venn diagram through google jamboard or other platforms like padlet that encourage your students to add their input. Encourage your family members to add their notes as well.

### Sample Venn Diagram:



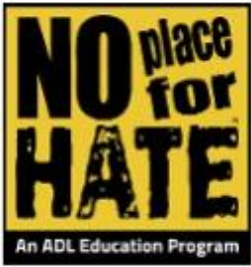


**High School:** *ADL believes our older students have more responsibility in the work of equity. Students are encouraged to research concepts, engage in discussion-based questions, and design their own lessons to demonstrate buy-in. See below for resources.*

- Review the history of Earth Day. What issues were we seeing as it relates to sustainability during the 1970s? How has that changed today?
- Explore the effects of climate change using NASA's Climate Time Machine.
  - Calculate how many planets are needed to support your lifestyle.
- Define the term Green Washing. What does that mean? Where do you see it taking place? How do we hold others accountable?
- Examine and educate the school community on how climate change disproportionately affects marginalized groups. Design an interactive template to gather student input.
- Educate students about indigenous ecosystems and our role in supporting indigenous people and moving away from harmful consumption practices.
- Review best practices around sustainability to design an effective policy or law that would bring change to your community. Share what you have created with your community and local officials to show your dedication to fighting climate change.
- Review the map that distinguishes climate change effects on gender and report out about these effects in different countries. *See map below.*

### **Discussion Questions:**

- **Introduction Level (Elementary School)**
  - What does climate change mean? Why are we talking about climate change?
  - What are some ways you think we are helping the environment?
  - What are some ways you think we are hurting the environment? Why do you think we do things that hurt the environment?
  - How has COVID-19 and quarantine impacted the environment? In good or bad ways?
  - What can we do every day or over many years to combat climate change?
  - What are some ways you can make a positive change on the environment? How does that look in school? How does that look at home?
  - Who are some young leaders who are climate change activists?



- **More Advanced Level (Middle/High School)**

- How has COVID-19 and quarantine impacted the environment?
- How is your community affected by climate change?
- How do we shift our approach from individual accountability to community action and systemic change?
- What is the intersection between other systemic issues and climate change? Who is most affected and why?
- What is the relationship between the food industry and climate change?
- What food-based companies are assisting in the fight?
- Do you think your community is doing enough to address climate change? If not, how can you help facilitate this?
- Why do you think there is pushback to the narrative of climate change?
- Who benefits from climate change? In what ways?
- Who are some young leaders who are climate change activists?
- In what ways do future laws and policies need to change as it pertains to climate justice? What should be included or excluded?

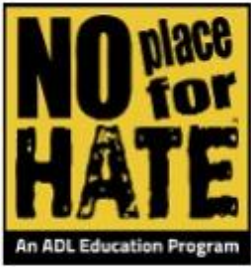
**ADL Resources:**

- Books Matter: We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstorm; Illustrated by Michaela Goade; Age Group 3-6

*When a black snake threatens to destroy the earth and poison her people's water, one young water protector takes a stand to defend earth's most sacred resource. Inspired by the many Indigenous-led movements across North America, this book issues an urgent rallying cry to safeguard the earth's water from harm and corruption.*

**Non-ADL Resources:**

- Morningside Lesson Plan: After the Storms, A Look At "Climate Injustice"
- Quiz: Carbon Footprint Calculator
- EPA Report: International Climate Impacts
- Research: Inequity in consumption of goods and services adds to racial-ethnic disparities in air pollution exposure
- Article: What is Climate Gentrification
- Interactive visualization: NASA's Climate Time Machine
- Intersection of marginalized groups & climate change resources:
- Interview: The Deep Links Between Racism and Climate Change



- Article: [What Is Climate Feminism?](#)
- Article: [Black Lives Matter: the link between climate change and racial justice](#)
- Article: [Racial Disparities and Climate Change](#)
- Fact Sheet: [Women, Gender Equality, and Climate Change](#)
- [Mapped: How climate change disproportionately affects women's health](#)
- Intersection of indigenous people & climate change resources:
- Article: [Climate Change | United Nations For Indigenous People](#)
- Article: [Indigenous peoples defend Earth's biodiversity—but they're in danger](#)
- Green Washing Resources: a term originated by environmental activist Jay Westervelt. There are many definitions coined by various people and organizations.
  - Research Article: [Concepts and forms of greenwashing: a systematic review](#)
  - Article, The Sustainability Times: <https://www.sustainability-times.com/green-consumerism/you-can-take-these-tips-to-avoid-being-greenwashed/>
  - Blog, Going Zero Waste: <https://www.goingzerowaste.com/blog/how-to-tell-if-youre-being-greenwashed/>

### **Suggested Documentaries:**

- Our Planet – Netflix
- Climate Change – The Facts on BBC
- I Am Greta - Hulu

### **Community Organizations:**

- NYC Climate Justice Organizations:
  - <https://www.uproise.org/mission>
  - <https://www.pcmny.org/rise-organizations>
  - <https://electrifyny.org/about/>
- Upstate New York Climate Justice Organizations:
  - [Environmental Advocates of New York](#)
  - [Sierra Club – Atlantic Chapter](#)
  - [People's Climate Movement NY](#)
  - [Capital District, NY Chapter](#)
  - [Northern Adirondack Region, NY](#)
  - [Hudson Valley and Catskill NY Chapter](#)