

ACTIVITIES

THE SUSTAINABILITY GAME



This is a game and discussion in which everyone learns about the idea of sustainable use of forest resources. For this game, your group will use pebbles to represent trees.

Before you play the sustainability game

Before you begin the sustainability game, begin by telling the class the name of the game. Next, give them a simple definition of sustainability. For instance, you could tell them that sustainability means using our trees and forests and other resources without using them up. To help the group to better understand, try giving them examples of sustainable use of forests and unsustainable use of forests. Ask them to consider the difference between cutting a few trees in a forest every year and cutting all the trees in the forest at once. If you can, provide them with a local example of a way that trees and forests are used sustainably.

Play the sustainability game

For this activity you will need a large number of small pebbles and paper and pencils for keeping score.

Teacher's Tip: Pebbles are readily available and easy to collect, but if you can, try using something small and good to eat for the game, like nuts, seeds or sweets. Because edible things have greater value to your group of young people, they will find it more difficult to share. In this way, the game will more closely reflect real life, in that

people find it difficult to share valuable resources like trees. Divide your group into “communities” or teams of at least four people each and place an equal number of pebbles, or “trees,” in communal piles, one for each community or team.

In each communal pile there must be at least twice the number of pebbles as there are people in the community, though there can be more. The fewer pebbles you place in each pile, the easier it is to play the game and to count the results. Assign one person in each community to record the number of pebbles taken by each community member in each round.

Explain the rules of the game as follows:

- Each community member may take from his/her communal pile as many pebbles or “trees” in each round as he/she wishes. However, because people depend on trees and forests, each player needs to take at least one pebble per round to survive.
- The game is played in rounds. Each round represents a year. The members of each community must reverse the order in which they take pebbles after each round. Reversing the order will ensure that whoever took pebbles first in the first year must take pebbles last in the next year and thus doesn’t have a permanent advantage.
- During each round everyone in the community must take at least one pebble or “tree”. When there aren’t enough pebbles in the community for everyone to take at least one pebble, that group has finished the game.
- After each round, you the teacher will count how many pebbles or “trees” each community has remaining in the pile, and add an equivalent number of pebbles or “trees” to the pile. The “trees” grow back after each round of play. They grow back by a factor of two. That means that if a community has taken all but one pebble or “tree” in the first round, then only two pebbles or “trees” will be available in the pile for the second round. If the team has 10 pebbles or “trees” left, then there will be 20 pebbles or “trees” available for the next year or round. Take a walk around during the game to make sure everyone remembers the rules.

Play three rounds, pausing after each round to find which communities are still playing and which ones are done. At the end of three rounds, those communities that have enough pebbles in the communal pile for each of its members to draw on have reached “pebble sustainability” and have survived. Suggest to the communities that if they work together in the community and agree to help one another, they might be able to make sure that their community survives. By working together and planning, some communities will be able to gain more pebbles and find a level of sustainable use.

Then have the communities play the game a second time, only this time ask them to think of ways to work together to make sure that there are pebbles or “trees” for the future.

When the second game is over, lead a discussion with your group of young people and ask them the questions provided below to reinforce the idea of how sustainability works.



In which communities did everyone survive?

Which community had the most pebbles in the pile at the end of the game?

Which communities are confident they will always have enough pebbles for everyone as long as the pile is renewed? How did these communities arrive at that point? What strategies were used?

Did a leader emerge in any of the communities that reached pebble sustainability?

If there was a leader, why did the community listen to that person? Could these communities have reached "pebble sustainability" without a plan?

Compare pebble ownership around the room. Of all the people in the room, who has the most pebbles? How did he or she accomplish this?

After you play the sustainability game

It is important that your group of young people understand that sustainability isn't just a game, that it is about how people use their trees and forest and other resources. Ask your group to make a list of items that their community uses from trees and forests. Then ask your group to think of **HOW** things from forests and trees are used by their community. Ask:

Is there anything on the list that is used in a way that is unsustainable?

Is there anything on the list that is used in a way that is sustainable?

Is there anything on the list that is used sustainably by some people but unsustainably by others?

Is there anything that can be done to ensure that the things on the list are used sustainably?

SOURCE: EARTHBIRD SERIES: FUTURE FORESTS CARTOON MAGAZINE

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POEM

*Grandma had a favourite saying
She said it till she was old and grey*

She said it till

She breathed her last

“That land is never at peace”,

She often stressed,

“Where a few have so much

And the rest have so little

“There is enough corn

For all the chickens of the world

If only they peck with equal beaks

And the fast tame their haste

For the benefit of those left behind”

By Niyi Osundare

Discuss this poem. Perhaps after playing the sustainability game!