Act Today for a Bright Future

A classroom resource for teaching sustainable living. This lesson package is part of the WE Schools WE Go Green campaign.

Grades 9 to 12
American Edition
Dear Educator,

Welcome to the WE movement. We are so glad you’ve joined us in our mission to inspire, educate and empower students to find their place and voice in the world. Throughout the last two decades, educators have stood by us. With over 16,000 schools thriving in WE Schools, we are delivering impressive results in academic engagement, life skills and civic engagement. Through experiential service-learning, students become more engaged in local and global issues.

We want to live a sustainable world. In our international development work, we have seen firsthand that development projects that do not include the community members it serves are not sustainable and do not work. Whenever we take on a new project, we ensure that community members not only support what we are doing, but that they are a part of the planning, training, execution and implementation. In North America, we strive for sustainability every day. In our new WE Global Learning Center headquarters, we have used sustainable materials, restored instead of rebuilt and ensure staff think about the costs of office behavior like printing so that we can play a key role in creating a sustainable world.

Act Today for a Bright Future is designed to help students understand the consequences of their behavior by putting into context how simple daily action can either increase or decrease their ecological footprint. Students will consider issues of sustainability from various perspectives to ensure that they don’t just see issues from their side. Considering other perspectives will help them be more empathetic to the many sides and issues of sustainability, so that they can create smarter solutions to support sustainable living.

This is an exciting time to work in education. Together, we have the power to reignite the fundamental purpose of education: moving students to want to learn, and preparing them with the life skills to better the world and forge their own paths to success.

Thank you for having the passion to bring WE into your classroom. We are honored and encouraged to work with such a dedicated and enthusiastic group.

We are stronger together,

Craig and Marc Kielburger
Co-Founders, WE
Essential Question: What is experiential service-learning and how can I incorporate it into my classroom instruction with WE Schools curriculum resources?

WE Schools
WE Schools is a unique, step-by-step program that challenges young people to identify the local and global issues that spark their passion and empowers them with the tools to take action. Educators and students work together to learn about the world and to take action to create meaningful change. Delivered in 16,000 schools and groups across North America and the UK, the program provides educators and students with curriculum, educational resources and a full calendar of campaign ideas.

The Four Steps of WE Schools
1. **Investigate and Learn**
   Students explore topics related to a real-world challenge or opportunity.

2. **Action Plan**
   Students develop a plan to implement their service-learning project, including one local and one global action.

3. **Take Action**
   Students implement their action plan.

4. **Report and Celebrate**
   Students present the results of their service-learning initiatives.

What Is Experiential Learning?
Experiential service-learning is based on a structured academic foundation that goes beyond volunteering and community service. It’s a practice that engages teachers and students with their communities in a structured way and allows students to meet their learning objectives while addressing their community’s needs.

Setting Students Up For Success: In School, the Workplace and Life
WE Schools Introduction: [WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/](http://WE.org/we-at-school/we-schools/)

Living WE is about improving our lives and our world by reaching out to others. It involves focusing less on “me” and more on “we”—our communities, our country and our world.

Social Emotional Learning: The WE Learning Framework is grounded in social emotional learning principles, helping students develop the skills to manage their emotions, resolve conflicts and make responsible decisions.

Global Mindset: The ability to operate comfortably across borders, cultures and languages is invaluable. WE Schools programming promotes global mindedness and cultural competency amongst student populations during their formative years.

Active Citizenship: Students act on their growing knowledge by connecting with others in their communities, thereby generating interest, further research and engagement in local and national causes.

Reflection is a key component of our experiential service-learning model. Our reflection activities direct students’ attention to new interpretations of events and provide a lens through which service can be studied and interpreted.
Act Today for a Bright Future Overview

As global citizens, it is essential that we understand our role in creating a sustainable planet for all. Each person needs to do their part to ensure the choices they make today will allow future generations to thrive.

Act Today for a Bright Future is a classroom resource that brings the issue of sustainability into the classroom and engages students to learn about the importance of living sustainably every day so future generations have the same opportunities that they have. Students will look at various matters within the issue of sustainability from a new perspective in order to understand the topic better. The resource includes detailed plans, blackline masters and appendices. The activities will educate young people and help them find the role they play in the global sustainability movement.

Subject(s): The Arts, English, Social Studies
Grade Level: Grades 9 to 12
WE Learning Framework Skills:

Essential Questions:
► How do humans impact the environment?
► What does it mean to live sustainably?

Word Bank

**Consume**—Use up (a resource), buy (goods or services).

**Ecological footprint**—The amount of land that is required to support the resource needs and waste of a person.

**Sustainability**—The avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance.

Source: Oxford Dictionaries [oxforddictionaries.com](http://oxforddictionaries.com)

Assessing the Learning

You know your students best—their learning styles and preferences, skill levels and knowledge. You are in the best position to anticipate the habits of mind that will make this classroom resource successful. We are mindful that students may be at different reading levels, including English Language Learners (ELL), and may have learning differences. In response, the Educator Notes throughout the resource make suggestions for differentiation along with extension and enrichment ideas that can be used.

Teaching strategies include film, storytelling, carousel, jigsaw and graffiti exercises. Assessment strategies include entry tickets, graphic organizers, think-pair-share, discussions, reflection and peer feedback.

Materials and Resources

- Chart paper and markers
- Appendix 1: Classroom Observation Forms
- Blackline Master 1: My Choices Questionnaire
- Blackline Master 2: Creating Sustainable Cities

Explore other resources and current campaign offerings at [WE.org](http://WE.org)
Lesson 1:
Living Sustainably

Suggested Time:
75 minutes

Learning Goals:
Students will:

- Understand the term sustainability as a way of life and what it means to their daily interactions and experiences
- Explore sustainability as it applies to an issue of interest to them

Investigate and Learn

1. Before class, fill a jar with water from a nearby river, lake, pond or tap, or bring in a bottle of water.

Educator’s Note: If it is not possible to bring in a vessel of water, use a photo that clearly depicts the general source.

2. Show students the jar of water by passing it around or displaying it at the front of the room. Ask students to think about the jar of water circulating the class then to think more broadly. Ask students:
   a. Where do you think this water came from?
   b. What is in this water?
   c. Where has this water been?
   d. How old is this water?
   e. Who owns the water?
   f. Is this water sustainable? How so?

3. Using think-pair-share, ask students to think about the jar of water circulating the class then to think more broadly. Ask students:
   a. What is sustainability? (E.g., the endurance of systems or processes. The continued existence of a system or process that is not exhausted into extinction.)
   b. What is sustainable? (I.e., what can exist indefinitely or a considerably long time? E.g., ecosystems, lifestyles, financial systems, urban/rural development, farming practices, etc.)
   c. Who is affected by sustainability? How so? (E.g., everyone is affected whether they contribute to it or not; they depend on it for their own existence.)
   d. How can you live sustainably? (In everything you do and everything you consume, think about the source, the use and the end of its life. Can it continue to exist in this manner? Will future generations be able to enjoy it too?)

4. Show students the jar of water by passing it around or displaying it at the front of the room. Ask students to think about the jar of water circulating the class then to think more broadly. Ask students:
   a. What sustainability is? (E.g., the endurance of systems or processes. The continued existence of a system or process that is not exhausted into extinction.)

5. Recommended Assessment As Learning: Using think-pair-share, ask students to think about the jar of water and ask, what makes water a sustainable resource? What makes rivers, lakes and ponds sustainable? Why are some rivers, lakes and ponds not sustainable? What happens to them? What do we need to do to ensure water is sustained and preserved for future generations?

6. Advise students that the key to thinking about sustainability is to think long-term. Issues of sustainability exist throughout generations. The more sustainably each generation behaves, the better they will leave the world for future generations.

Sustainability has been a long-considered issue. In 1962, marine biologist Rachel Carson wrote a book launching an environmental movement. Silent Spring examines the effects of new chemical technologies, such as pesticides, on our world. She believed that the continued use of chemicals would alter the world as it was known. Carson cautioned that the “architects of our future” may be taking hold through the use of chemicals permanently altering our genetic makeup and, therefore, with an obligation to endure, we must act now.

7. With this in mind, read the following Silent Spring excerpt to students:

All this has been risked—for what? Future historians may well be amazed by our distorted sense of proportion. How could intelligent beings seek to control a few unwanted species by a method that contaminated the entire environment and brought the threat of disease and death even to their own kind? Yet this is precisely what we have done.

8. Ask the class to explain the excerpt by putting it into their own words.

9. Now that students understand the theory of sustainability and the lasting effects of our behavior, have them dive deeper. Instruct students to visit the National Geographic website and search using the term “sustainability.” www.nationalgeographic.com/search/?q=sustainability

All this has been risked—for what? Future historians may well be amazed by our distorted sense of proportion. How could intelligent beings seek to control a few unwanted species by a method that contaminated the entire environment and brought the threat of disease and death even to their own kind? Yet this is precisely what we have done.

10. Recommended Assessment Of Learning: Focusing on one aspect of sustainability (e.g., sustainable farming, sustainable health, sustainable urban development, etc.) ask students to write a letter, record a message or create a photo essay to someone in the future. As a class, select a time and create a time capsule (made from sustainable materials) to put the letters in. In the letter, students should explain how they will work with others to live in a sustainable manner and describe the importance of living sustainably.
Lesson 2: The Human Impact

Suggested Time:
120 minutes (over two classes)

Learning Goals:
Students will:

• Review their current understanding of the term ecological footprint and explore their ability to limit their own footprint
• Consider various perspectives on ecological issues

Part 1

1. **Recommended Assessment For Learning:** Distribute Blackline Master 1: My Choices Questionnaire. Have students complete the questionnaire to help them gain a better understanding of how they consume and discard natural resources. As students complete the questionnaire, circulate and record observations of student knowledge using the forms in Appendix 1: Classroom Observation Forms.

2. Now that students have an idea of their resource consumption, ask students:
   a. Which of your consumption behaviors surprised you the most? Why?
   b. What changes can you make to your lifestyle to make it more sustainable?
   c. Do you think a sustainable lifestyle is a short-term or long-term commitment? Why?
   d. Do you know what an ecological footprint is? If so, how does your ecological footprint relate to how you consume natural resources?
   e. Do ecological footprints come in different sizes? Explain?
   f. Who has ecological footprints?
   g. If someone has a large ecological footprint what does that say about his or her consumption and waste habits?

3. In groups of three to four, have students list the 10 countries they believe have the largest ecological footprint. Ensure students include the rank they believe the United States holds on the list, whether they believe it is in the top 10 or not.

4. **Recommended Assessment Of Learning:** Prepare a graffiti exercise. Post five pieces chart paper around the room with markers. Write one of the following questions on each piece of paper:
   a. What do the facts suggest about Americans’ collective behavior? What can we infer?
   b. Would you consider the United States’ ecological footprint large or small? Why?

5. **Recommended Assessment Of Learning:** Write the following on the board then ask students to come to the board and add to a tally by marking the one that they think is the most important:
   a. The uses of harvested trees
   b. The impact humans have on trees
   c. The impact trees have on the environment

   **Educator’s Note:** As an alternative, consider using a polling app with your students that will instantly share the results.

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<th>Rank</th>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>10.51</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>8.00</td>
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<td>Estonia</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Canada</td>
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<td>Australia</td>
<td>6.84</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Iceland</td>
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6. Ask for a few volunteers to explain their response.

7. Encourage students to think of the multiple perspectives to issues of sustainability by examining the ecological effects of deforestation. By understanding issues from other perspectives, students will be better equipped to prepare and argue their opinions. Provide students with “Tropical Deforestation” from NASA, earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/Deforestation/, and highlighters or sticky notes. Instruct students to read the article independently and highlight or note key information.

8. Tell the students that, based on information gathered from the article and any additional knowledge, they will hold a conference on deforestation. Students will be assigned a role in groups of two to three. Within each group, students should pick one or two people who will be speaking and the remaining group members will be supports, organizing information for the presenter. Based on their role they will prepare discussion points and counter arguments to persuade other attendees to consider their perspective. Select roles from the following list or add additional roles, record roles on scraps of paper, put them into a vessel and have students pick roles from the vessel.

Roles may include, but are not limited to:

- Loggers employed to harvest trees
- Logging industry representatives
- Greenpeace representatives
- Local citizens
- Local politicians
- Scientists from NASA
- Scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Local farmers
- Trade politicians
- Meteorologists

9. Once students have their roles, provide the following questions for students to consider in their preparations:
   a. Why are you interested in this issue?
   b. What about the issue do you care about? Be specific.
   c. Who are you representing?
   d. Given the other representatives that will be present at the conference, who do you consider an ally and who do you consider an opponent? Why? How might you be able to work with other representatives?
   e. What outcome would you like to see?

10. Encourage students to re-read the article from the perspective of their role. Use a different color of highlighter to capture the differences in what is considered important. Allow students time to perform additional research and prepare for the conference.

11. Before holding the conference, agree on the process for the conference. Will each representative group be allowed to take the floor? Will there be an open debate? Consider selecting a specific issue or theme within tropical deforestation to address. Then set an agenda.

12. Recommended Assessment Of Learning: Hold the conference, arrange the desks in a large circle so that everyone can hear and see each other. Begin the conference by welcoming all representatives and open the floor for conversation. Ensure students are respectful in their discussion. Arguments should be centered on the issue and not personal attacks.
Lesson 3:

**Sustainable Cities**

**Suggested Time:**
150 minutes

**Learning Goals:**
Students will:
- Understand the impact cities can have on the environment
- Explore the ways that cities are reducing their ecological footprint

**Investigate and Learn**

1. As students enter the class, provide them with a slip of paper or an entry ticket and ask them to list the three most important things they have learned about sustainability so far.

2. Give students five minutes to record their responses and then ask them to use think-pair-share to discuss their responses.

3. **Recommended Assessment For Learning:** Choose three or four pairs to share their responses with the class. Collect the entry slips to assess students’ understanding of sustainability.

4. Explain to students that, like humans, cities also have an ecological footprint. The way a city is designed, the types of building materials that are used, and the types of services a city provides can all contribute to a city’s impact on the environment.

5. Show students “Sustainable Cities: Nature-Based Solutions in Urban Design,” www.vimeo.com/155849692 (7:52) and discuss the following questions:
   - How do cities negatively impact the environment?
   - What does Khalil Kettering mean when he says, “a city is like an ecosystem”?
   - How does the concrete/asphalt used in a city contribute to its ecological footprint?
   - How is Khalil Kettering using inspiration from nature to design a more sustainable city?

6. In pairs or small groups, have students investigate one of the following projects that are helping to create more sustainable cities around the world using the resources provided. Provide each student with a copy of Blackline Master 2: Creating Sustainable Cities to guide their investigation.

   - **Urban Agriculture**
     - “Green Thumb in the City,” www.WE.org/stories/green-city-force-brings-farm-fresh-food-to-the-city/
     - “City Growers,” www.citygrowers.org

   - **Air-Purifying Buildings**

   - **Solar Architecture**
     - “Taiwan’s Solar Stadium 100% Powered by the Sun,” www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/may/20/taiwan-solar-stadium

   - **Bicycles and Urban Mobility**
     - “Sustainable Transport Award” www.staward.org/winners/2017-santiago-chile
     - “The Buses of Bogotá,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=cU6lmWY41Bc (2:20)

   **Educator’s Note:** To explore this topic in more detail, show students “e2-Bogota: Building a Sustainable City,” www.vimeo.com/37143020 (25:38) to explore the approach the city of Bogotá is taking to reducing its ecological footprint and increasing environmental, social and economic sustainability.

7. **Recommended Assessment As Learning:** As students are researching and gathering information, circulate and use one of the forms from Appendix 1: Classroom Observation Forms to assess students’ understanding of sustainability. This is also an opportunity to answer questions and clarify any misunderstandings.
Recommended Assessment Of Learning: Have students organize and present their information in a written report, an oral or visual presentation or as part of display for the school or local community. Make sure to collect students’ research and presentation materials to use as evidence for assessment.

Extension/Enrichment: Challenge students to become sustainable urban planners. Using a map of the local community, have students create a plan for how they could reduce their community’s ecological footprint. To take it further, encourage students to draft a proposal and submit it to local businesses, or the local government or city council.
Lesson 4:

Reduce, Reuse and Recycle

Suggested Time:
120 minutes (over one week)

Learning Goals:
Students will:
• Identify an issue of environmental sustainability
• Take action by designing and completing a personal challenge to increase reducing, reusing and recycling

1. Recommended Assessment For Learning: Check student understanding of issues of sustainability. Ask for suggestions of issues of sustainability, such as deforestation. Students may respond orally, visually or in writing. Record the suggestions on the front board. The list may include, but is not limited to, the following:
   a. Water usage
   b. Sustainable sourcing of materials
   c. Improving nutrition
   d. Health and hygiene
   e. Opportunities for women
   f. Fairness and equality
   g. Sustainable cities
   h. Urban/rural land use
   i. Wildlife and habitat preservation
   j. Sustainable fishing

2. Explain to students they will be focusing on the three R’s: reducing, reusing and recycling, as an issue of environmental sustainability. Students should select a topic related to at least one of the three R’s that they are interested in to take action on.

3. Recommended Assessment As Learning: Ask students to reflect on how they might already reduce, reuse and recycle. Create a quick bar graph poll on the board. Write Reduce, Reuse, Recycle along the bottom of the front board. Providing sticky notes, invite each student to come up to the board and stack one note per column vertically on the board if they reduce, reuse or recycle.

4. Ask students which of the three R’s has the greatest effect on sustainability. It is likely that many students will mark that they recycle, but reducing and reusing are less popular. Remind students that it is more sustainable to reduce consumption and waste as well as reuse products and items rather than recycling alone, though recycling is an important sustainable practice to make a habit. For example, buying clothes at a second-hand or thrift shop or wearing hand-me-downs reduces the need for new clothes, as clothes that already exist are reused.

Action Plan

5. Recommended Assessment Of Learning: Students will now create a personal challenge to reduce, reuse and recycle. The challenge may include the following:
   a. An issue related to reducing, reusing or recycling.
   b. A challenge and plan to examine this issue (students may consider examining it from a different perspective). The challenge should last for about a week.
   c. An explanation of how they are going to fulfill the challenge.
   d. A series of planned checkpoints to understand learnings as they happen (e.g., once a day, every other day). Checkpoints may include, but are not limited to:
      i. Snapchat post
      ii. Facebook post
      iii. Twitter tweet
      iv. Instagram photo
      v. Blog post
      vi. Podcast
      vii. Journal entry
      viii. Mixed media art piece
      ix. Comic strip
   e. A final reflection may take the form of, but is not limited to:
      i. School or community newspaper article
      ii. Video presentation
      iii. Song
      iv. Blog post
      v. Short story
      vi. Poem

6. Once students are have selected their issue, allow time for research. Provide students with the following questions to guide their research:
   • How does this issue impact the environment?
   • Who is affected by this issue?
   • Who contributes to this issue?
   • How could this issue be addressed or solved?

7. Students should hand in an outline of their plan that states the checkpoints and final reflection piece before they begin the challenge.

Action Plan

8. As part of the final reflection, students may answer the following questions:
   a. Why is the issue you selected an issue of environmental sustainability?
   b. How did your plan help to address this issue?
   c. Why is it important to examine this issue of sustainability?
   d. Does this issue need immediate attention? Why or why not?
   e. What did you learn during your challenge?
   f. Will your experience from the challenge change your behavior? How so?
Lesson 5:

WE Go Green

Suggested Time:
30 minutes plus time for Report and Celebrate

Learning Goals:
Students will:

• Share a message of sustainability with the community

Investigate and Learn

1. Remind students that they are creating a brighter future when they decrease negative impacts like leaving lights on unnecessarily, chargers plugged in when not in use and running the faucet full blast while brushing teeth; and creating a more sustainable world when they pack lunches in reusable containers and buy clothes from thrift shops. Let them know that their efforts can be connected to young people around the world who believe in creating a sustainable planet.

2. Share WE Go Green, a WE Schools campaign that promotes action on issues of sustainability, visit www.WE.org/we-schools/program/campaigns/we-go-green-global/.

3. Keeping in mind all that they have learned in previous lessons, ask students:
   a. What are goals of the campaign?
   b. Why is the campaign important?
   c. How can participating in this campaign affect local, national and global communities?

4. Encourage students to sign up for the WE Go Green campaign by registering at www.WE.org/we-schools/program/campaigns/we-go-green-global/.

5. Before interacting on or using social media, review classroom and school guidelines. Before interacting with members of the wider community, review classroom guidelines on etiquette and respect.

6. Ensure students are actively participating and collecting data throughout the Take Action phase by recording observations on the forms in Appendix 1: Classroom Observation Forms.

Report and Celebrate

7. Recommended Assessment Of Learning: Now that students have taken steps to live more sustainably, encourage them to share what they have learned with the community by painting a mural using environmentally friendly paint.

Educator’s Note: Explore school district policy for availability of space and supplies.

8. Find a location and secure permission. Consider having students organize this part. If a permanent wall cannot be found, use large sheets of canvas or wood that has been primed.

9. With the class, create a master plan. Divide the class into groups of four to five. Ask for ideas of overall vision and message for the mural. Students may use the following questions as guiding principles:
   a. What are the key lessons we learned while studying sustainability?
   b. What are the most important parts of what we learned?
   c. What images would explain sustainable living to someone who has not completed these lessons?
   d. What is the purpose of painting the mural?
   e. Where will the mural be located? Who will see it? What do we want them to learn from the mural?

10. Provide groups with piece of chart paper to sketch out ideas. Have groups take turns presenting to the class. Take a vote to select one of the proposals or find a way to incorporate multiple ideas.

11. Divide the mural space into grid sections. Using the proposal sketch, lay out an outline. Work in teams to complete the mural.
## Appendix 1: Classroom Observation Forms

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## Appendix 1: Classroom Observation Forms

### Classroom Observation Form 2

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Blackline Master 1: My Choices Questionnaire

Name: _________________________________

1. I run the shower for ____ each time.
   □ Less than 5 minutes
   □ 5-10 minutes
   □ 11-15 minutes
   □ Over 15 minutes

2. While I’m brushing my teeth I:
   □ Leave the water running the whole time
   □ Turn off the water until I need it

3. ____ of my food is grown locally.
   □ All
   □ Some
   □ None

4. ____ of my food has extra unnecessary packaging.
   □ All
   □ Some
   □ None

5. When I go out with my friends, I usually travel by ____:
   □ Bike, skateboard, roller blades or I walk
   □ Public transportation
   □ Car

6. To get to and from school I:
   □ Take a school bus/public transit
   □ Ride my bike, skateboard, roller blade or walk
   □ Get a ride from my parents or drive myself
   □ Carpool

7. To go to and from afterschool activities I:
   □ Take a school bus/public transit
   □ Ride my bike, skateboard, roller blade or I walk
   □ Get a ride from my parents or drive myself
   □ Carpool

8. During the colder seasons, to heat my room:
   □ I use a plug-in heater
   □ I use our home heating system (thermostat or baseboard heating)
   □ I mostly use blankets to keep warm at night

9. During the warmer seasons, I primarily use:
   □ Fans
   □ Central air conditioning
   □ Individual room air conditioning units
   □ None of the above

10. When I’m the last one to leave a room:
    □ I always turn the lights off
    □ I usually turn the lights off
    □ I rarely turn the lights off
    □ I always leave the lights on

11. I charge my cell phone ____ hours per day.

12. I watch television at home ____ hours per day.

13. I use my desktop/laptop/tablet ____ hours per day.

14. When I am not using my desktop/laptop/tablet I usually:
    □ Leave it on all the time when not in use
    □ Turn it off when I’m not using it, but usually keep the power adapter plugged in
    □ Turn it off when I’m not using it and unplug it when it is fully charged
    □ I don’t use a desktop/laptop/tablet

15. For class assignments:
    □ I usually use fresh paper and print or write on one side only
    □ I usually use fresh paper and print or write on both sides
    □ I usually use recycled paper and print or write on one side only
    □ I usually use recycled paper and print or write on both sides
    □ I usually reuse paper that has already been printed on one side

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Blackline Master 2: Creating Sustainable Cities

Name: _________________________________

Summarize the project and provide at least one example.
What is the purpose of the project? How does it support people and the environment?

How could this project reduce a city’s ecological footprint?
In what ways does this project reduce waste and protect natural resources?

How could this project make a city more sustainable?
What aspects of the project will help a city protect its natural resources for the future?