The Launch: Getting Started!
The Launch: Getting Started!

**purpose** | to prepare for the Earth Force experience

**what needs to happen**

[1] Introduce the concept of environmental citizenship.
   - Share stories of environmental and civic engagement.

   - Explain the 6-step Earth Force process.
   - Define the qualities of a successful Earth Force project.

---

**knowledge**
- ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS
- HISTORICAL AWARENESS
- POLICY & PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT
- STAKEHOLDERS & INTEREST GROUPS
- CIVIC ABILITY
- PROGRAM KNOWLEDGE
- INCLUSIVITY

**skills**
- RESEARCH
- ANALYSIS
- COMMUNICATION
- COOPERATION
- ADVOCACY
- PROBLEM-SOLVING
- REFLECTION

**character traits**
- CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY
- CONFIDENCE
- INTERDEPENDENCE
- COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS
- ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT
- SOCIAL RESPECT
- PROGRAM AFFINITY
**A WORD ABOUT “CITIZENSHIP”**

We often use the term “environmental citizenship” as short hand for the collection of long-term outcomes that we hope to nurture among students who participate in Earth Force. Before delineating what we mean by this, it’s important to note what we don’t mean:

We don’t limit our understanding of “citizen” to the narrow sense of the term—one who is legally recognized as a citizen of a state or nation. Rather, we use the broader definition of the term—one who is a member of a community.

Thus, our notion of “citizenship” has little to do with legal status and everything to do with the stuff it takes to meaningfully participate in a community.

Nonetheless, citizenship—at least as we conceptualize it—is central to the Earth Force experience.

If this terminology is not appropriate for your students, consider using “Community Problem Solver,” or allowing the students to come up with their own term.

---

**A WORD ABOUT “ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP”**

We hope to nurture ideal “environmental citizens”:

**Environmental Citizen:** A proactive member of the community who understands the importance of being a steward of the planet’s limited natural resources and is committed to going beyond private actions by using civic actions to sustain them.

On page 4 is a listing of the attributes that collectively comprise our image of an Environmental Citizen. This entire curriculum has been designed to offer lessons and resources that will help you nurture these attributes among your students.

---

**A WORD ABOUT THE EARTH FORCE EXPERIENCE**

While it is tempting to use the word project when discussing Earth Force with your students, we prefer to use experience, a term that emphasizes process over product. Students will gain knowledge, skills and character development as they follow the 6-step process. The learning that takes place during this experience is, in the end, more valuable than the success of their action project down the road.

Allowing frequent opportunities to reflect upon their Earth Force experience will allow them to realize their personal gains; their perception of success will not be limited to the implementation of their strategy.
service-learning best practices

planning tips

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED...

☐ Identify how much time you have for the whole project. Plan backwards from when you need to be totally finished, and find the right date for the Launch.

☐ Determine specific curricular or other requirements that must be met during the process. You can make that a focus of the Launch.

☐ Inform the principal.

☐ Consider posting a timeline in the classroom.

THINKING AHEAD...

☐ How much time do you have set aside for future steps?

☐ Make sure you have set “milestone” dates for important activities, by step.

service is a good thing!

If you are working with an urban population, you may encounter youth who—rather than having no experience with community service—have a negative image of community service. In some cities, community service is used as a punishment for juvenile criminal offenses. Thus, it’s best to not use the term “community service” at all. It’s just service—and that’s a good thing!

DO...

... encourage the students to feel powerful and respected as a force for community change

... post something in the classroom—the start of a timeline, an Earth Force CAPS “Cycle” poster, a “contract” all the students sign stating they care about their community, anything!—that will remind the students of their connection to Earth Force.

DON’T...

... ever skip the Launch, if you can help it. It is a critical relationship builder between Earth Force and the class.

... encourage the kids to start thinking about projects they want to do yet. Stay true to the process. Focus on the Six Steps.

at a glance

THE LAUNCH SHOULD:

➤ Give the whole process a “Kick Off!” feel, so students are excited and know they are on the road toward their project.

BEFORE MOVING ON, THE GROUP SHOULD HAVE:

➤ An idea of what their “community” is.

➤ A feeling of readiness to start their inventory.
The Launch | Getting Started!

or “How to Get the Whole Process Rolling!”

DEFINING ACTIVITIES

■ The Launch, of course!

SUGGESTED TOOLS, TRIPS + ACTIVITIES

• If you are working with younger students, have them make up a gesture or action for each Step, to help them remember it. Have them repeat all of the actions they make up, and reward them if they can recall them all.

(ex) A student might put his hands to his eyes like binoculars for “inventory,” or she might make up a little dance for “celebration!”

• Down River City is an excellent activity for helping students understand how their actions have an impact on other people.

PARTNER OPPORTUNITIES

• If another class in the school has done Earth Force before, have some of those students come to the Launch and talk to the younger students about their experience.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

• Do you feel young people can make a difference? Why or why not?

• What do you think Earth Force is going to be like? (Write down these answers to revisit in Step Six!)

• Have you ever done service in your community before? Who came up with the project? What was the experience like?

• How do you think service would be different if you got to choose what you would be doing?

WHAT YOU MAY STILL BE WORRIED ABOUT

• Will my kids get excited about this? Yes! A Launch that focuses on student voice, the power of youth to make change, and the leadership youth can provide in community issues will get students raring to go forward.

• What if my students have a really negative view of “community service”? The Launch is a positive, fun, motivating introduction. Be open to what students may already think about “community service,” and let them talk about their pre-conceived notions. Then we’ll break them down!
### Attributes of an Environmental Citizen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>knowledge</th>
<th>skills</th>
<th>character traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Awareness of current local environmental issues, needs, and resources.</td>
<td><strong>RESEARCH</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ability to conduct a thorough and balanced investigation of the root causes of a local environmental and/or community issue.</td>
<td><strong>CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sense of personal responsibility for and commitment to the long-term well-being of the environment and the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORICAL AWARENESS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Understanding how the past ecological events, political decisions, and economy have affected the environment.</td>
<td><strong>ANALYSIS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ability to assess various sources of information for credibility and bias.</td>
<td><strong>CONFIDENCE</strong>&lt;br&gt;Belief in one’s abilities to make a positive change in the environment and community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLICY &amp; PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT</strong>&lt;br&gt;Understanding that environmental issues might be influenced by public and private policies and community practices.</td>
<td><strong>COMMUNICATION</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ability to defend a position on an environmental issue both orally and in writing.</td>
<td><strong>INTERDEPENDENCE</strong>&lt;br&gt;Belief that it is both valuable and necessary to work together for a common purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STAKEHOLDERS &amp; INTEREST GROUPS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Awareness of the decision-makers who can influence public and private policies and community practices associated with an environmental issue.</td>
<td><strong>COOPERATION</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ability to work cooperatively with peers and adults toward a common end.</td>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sense of bonding with and respect for educators, community leaders, and other adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CIVIC ABILITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Understanding of the roles that citizens can play in shaping policies or community practices to help the environment.</td>
<td><strong>ADVOCACY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ability to bring about a plan for sustainable improvements to the environment or community.</td>
<td><strong>ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT</strong>&lt;br&gt;Personal sense of achievement and accomplishment in and out of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROGRAM KNOWLEDGE</strong>&lt;br&gt;Understanding the mission, scope and process of Earth Force.</td>
<td><strong>PROBLEM-SOLVING</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ability to make wise decisions and plans to solve environmental and community issues through the use of sound research.</td>
<td><strong>SOCIAL RESPECT</strong>&lt;br&gt;Willingness to respectfully consider diverse points of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INCLUSIVITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Understanding the importance of integrating diverse experiences and perspectives into all aspects of learning.</td>
<td><strong>REFLECTION</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ability to think critically about experiences so lessons can be learned.</td>
<td><strong>PROGRAM AFFINITY</strong>&lt;br&gt;Sense of connectedness to a national movement of students involved in Earth Force.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
L1 | Youth for a Change

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE** | Develop an enhanced sense of their personal role as an environmental citizen

---

**key concepts**

- community
- environment
- sustainable
- environmental issue
- environmental citizen

---

**Lesson L1 Snapshot**

---

**MATERIALS**

- Handouts: LA, LB, LC, LD

**TIME**

- 60 minutes

**ADVANCE PREP**

- Read the Background Information section of this unit.
- Make copies of handouts for each student as needed.
- For younger elementary students, preview the survey for vocabulary that is unfamiliar to your students.

---

**PROCEDURES IN BRIEF**

- Engage students in the story of the mutated frogs.
- Introduce the concept of Environmental Citizen.
- Have students begin their Earth Force portfolios.

**PORTFOLIO**

Complete a story from "Journey of a Citizen" and place it in the portfolio.

---

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

- How would you describe the community in which you live?
- What does “environment” mean to you?
- What environmental issues have you observed?

---

**REFLECTION**

Incorporate answers to the reflection questions into the students’ Portfolios.

- How do you feel about your upcoming Earth Force experience?
- Why should you care about taking care of the environment? What does the environment provide for you?
- What could happen if you decide to ignore the problems you see in the environment?
1. **Administer and Collect the Earth Force Pre-surveys.**

   The survey packet you receive from your Earth Force support person will contain instructions on how to administer them. Be sure to return them to Earth Force immediately afterward.

2. **Engage the Students in the Story of the Mutated Frogs.**

   Show students the transparency with the mutated frogs out of focus so they can’t tell what it is (Handout LA). Ask students what they think the picture is showing. After a few guesses bring the picture into focus. Discuss the idea that during their Earth Force project there will be times when you brainstorm together but won’t have all the information you need. At the beginning of their project things may seem a bit fuzzy, but as they continue to look into their issue deeper, it will become clearer.

   Tell the true story about middle school students from Minnesota who became active environmental citizens when they discovered and attempted to solve a very interesting issue. (Handout LB)

   After telling the story, highlight the fact that students didn’t choose a project just to choose one, but they chose an issue that was important to them. Talk about the importance of how the students called upon their local environmental agency to work with them and how crucial this was to their success on the project. Students had many different ideas about what could have caused the deformities in the frogs but they knew better than to jump to conclusions. The students were able to make a real difference in their community by alerting scientists, continuing to monitor water, raising awareness about the problem, and creating interest among legislators to fund research.

   Explain that more often than not, students will be able to work with issues that involve humans’ impact on the environment. Their goal will be to make a sustainable or long-lasting difference. Explain that frogs have skin that is permeable; they breathe through their skin. Most of the water they need to survive is absorbed through their skin. Whatever is in a frog’s surroundings can end up inside of it. For this reason, scientists view frogs as a bio-indicator species—a biological warning system that things aren’t right in the environment.

   Ask students to share their ideas about what could happen to the frogs who were unable to move out from the pond in search of food because of malformed legs. Would they be more susceptible to predation?

3. **Introduce the Concept of Environmental Citizen.**

   Be sure you have read Background Information beforehand.

   Ask students what they think the phrase means. Ensure the students understand that for our purposes it doesn’t refer to legal citizenship.

   Explain that it’s simply a way of thinking and acting responsibly for the environment and/or the community. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it’s fun and — it’s important not to overlook this point — it’s something they’re probably already doing to some extent.

4. **Have Students Begin Their Earth Force Portfolios.**

   Tell students that it is now time for them to tell their stories about their experience as an environmental citizen or a community problem solver. Explain the purpose of a portfolio—a collection of work that demonstrates individual strengths and documents their growth. Direct students to begin completing the document for homework. Use Handout LC.

---

**Learning Objective:** Develop an enhanced sense of their personal role as an environmental citizen.
The Launch | **Getting Started!**

**L1 | extensions**

---

**CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

**science**
Introduce the anatomy of a northern leopard frog and frog habitats.
Have students do further research on mutations.

**social studies**
Use a local map to identify possible frog habitats in your own area.

**math**
Talk about percentages. The story says that 11/22 frogs they caught that day had abnormalities.

**literacy**
Practice finding examples from the text. Have a group of students generate questions and have another look for answers using examples in the text.

**technology**
Conduct a news media internet search to find more recent stories of mutated frogs. Challenge students to find one connected to what the MN students found.

**DIFFERENTIATION**

**english learners**
Have students practice oral language development by describing the frogs to each other in detail and how they are abnormal.
Review vocabulary ahead of time that might be confusing: abnormal, deformities, to their dismay, bio-indicator, alerted, etc.

**special needs**
Read aloud at least once, then cut apart the paragraphs and have students put them in the correct order.