# NEEDS & WANTS

5–12 YEAR OLDS

AN ACTIVITY ON THE ENVIRONMENT FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

## OBJECTIVE

To understand the global consequences of individual overconsumption in light of the principles of Stewardship of Creation and the Common Good.

## TIME

25-40 minutes

## GROUP SIZE

6-30 students

## MATERIALS

- Whiteboard or poster paper (to be visible throughout the activity)
- Chalk or markers
- Blocks (you may use balls instead) (4 per participant)
- Buckets (1 per group)
- A cloth to cover the buckets

## PREPARATION

- Before the activity, prepare a bucket containing enough blocks for each group. Put four blocks into the bucket for each person in the group. For example, if there are 10 people in the group, you should have 40 blocks in the bucket. The bucket will be placed in the middle of the group.
  NB: Larger groups can be subdivided into smaller groups. Each group should have its own bucket of blocks.
- Prepare a Needs/Wants Chart, as below, on the whiteboard/poster paper. This will be used in Step 2. Leave both columns blank for now.

| NEEDS | WANTS |
|---|---|
| | |

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# SEE GAME PLAY

## STEP 1

First, discuss with the students how everything we use comes from the Earth. What is on the Earth is limited, so we need to take care of these resources. Use examples from your classroom and help the students think of where things originated. For example, our food comes from plants and animals; some of our clothes are made from cotton plants; wood, paper and rubber come from trees; cement is made from rock; metals are found underground; and plastic is made from oil, which is also found underground.

## STEP 2

**(7-10 minutes)**
Lead a discussion with students on the difference between needs and wants. Explain that needs are things that are necessary for humans to survive and be healthy. Wants are items that we like to have because they give us pleasure and/or make our lives easier.

Using the chart you've prepared, help the students brainstorm a list of things that they need to have and a list of things that they want – or like – to have in their lives. This discussion may need some negotiation with students to clarify the purpose of items, depending on their age and the context in which they live (for example, a bicycle could be used for transportation or recreation). Older students could discuss how things we may consider needs (like multiple cars or a family car) may not necessarily be needs if we think of living differently (using only a single car per household, or public transit where it is available).

Examples:

| Needs | Wants |
|---|---|
| Food (adequate nutrition)<br>Shelter (house or apartment)<br>Water<br>Transportation (public transit and bikes may be enough in urban areas)<br>Community (socializing, recreational opportunities, etc.)<br>Clothing<br>Education | Candy, junk food<br>Large house, summer cottage<br>Soft drinks, bottled water<br>Several cars per household, luxury vehicles<br>Lots of toys, video games, exotic vacations, several TVs or tablets per household, 'new' bikes, etc.<br>The latest fashions, jewellery, many pairs of shoes |

**** The goal here is to distinguish between needs and wants. We must be careful not to vilify wants; it is good to live a good and joyful life. This activity proposes that we need to consider limiting how many wants we have, not eliminate all wants**.

## STEP 3

Place a covered bucket in the middle of each group. Do not reveal how many blocks (or balls) are in the bucket. Explain that the bucket represents the Earth, and the blocks in it represent all of the goods or items that the group can use to meet its basic needs and some wants. The Earth was made with enough to support all of us. We can live in a way that allows the Earth to provide a good life for everyone – that meets our basic needs and a few of our wants.

## STEP 4

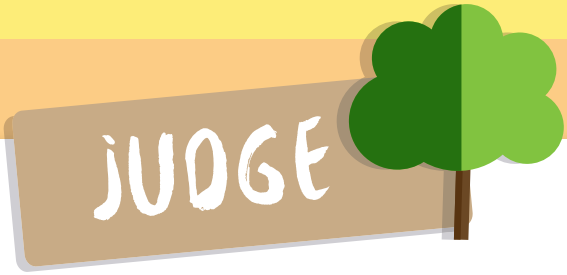
**(5-7 minutes)**
Divide the group in half (for odd-numbered groups, place the extra student in the second half). Explain that the blocks/balls represent both basic needs and wants. Students in the first half will choose their basic needs and their wants first. They will start by taking three blocks each to satisfy three basic needs – food, water and shelter.

When the students in the first half of the group have taken their three basic blocks, they can choose one or more of the remaining blocks to represent other things they want in their lives. Each time they take one of these blocks they will say the name of the want it represents. They may choose up to a maximum of three wants each. If they decide they want a community pool, a library, a school or other shared community resource, only the first student takes a block for this want. This would not prevent another student from selecting the same item to have as their own (for example, a home pool even when there is a community pool).

## STEP 5

Next, the second half of the group takes a turn choosing blocks to meet their three basic needs – food, water and shelter. Depending on how many wants the first group chose (how many blocks they took), there may or may not be enough blocks for each student in the second group to cover their basic needs. If there are not enough blocks to meet the needs of the second group, the discussion begins.

If there are enough blocks to meet the basic needs of the second group, they now also have the opportunity to choose their wants, one at a time, until the blocks run out. Once all of the blocks have been chosen, begin the discussion.




## DISCUSSION

**(7-10 minutes)**

Begin by asking the students in the second half of the group how they felt when they:

a) were not able to have all three of their basic needs met; or
b) were not able to get as many wants as they hoped for, or as many wants as the students in the first group got.

Then, ask the students in the first group how they felt when they:

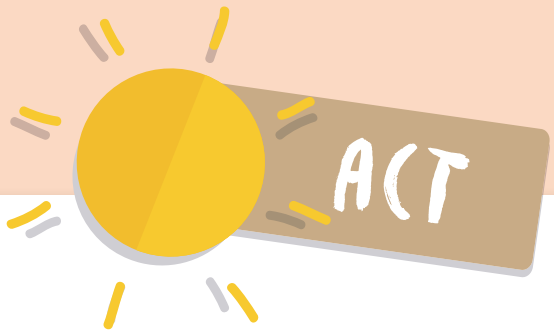
a) had the freedom to meet all of their needs and choose as many wants as they liked; and
b) saw that there were not enough blocks to meet the basic needs of the second half and/or to provide that group with as many wants as they themselves had taken.

Tell the students that at the beginning of the game, there were enough blocks for every student to meet their three basic needs, and to have one want each. In the same way, our Earth provides enough resources for everyone to have a good life, but if we meet all of our wants before others have a chance to even meet their basic needs, we use up more than our fair share of the Earth's resources.

Often, we do not see or know the people around the world who do not have their needs and wants met. In this game, the second half of the group represents such people in other countries. The first half of each group represents people who can satisfy all of their needs and wants and who often use more than their fair share of the Earth's resources.

Now that we can see how taking too much can affect other people, we can change the balance! Ask the first group of students if they would be willing to share their blocks. Which of their wants would they be willing to give up so that students in the second group could have a fair share? Have the students share their blocks, and affirm that they can still have some of the things they want to live a good life.

Ensure that the students understand that the world produces enough for all. If we live more simply, we can still enjoy the things we like without taking more than our share. Taking more than our share also harms our planet.




Explain to the students that one of the best ways to make sure that everyone's needs are met is to take care of the environment. We all need a healthy environment to make sure that we can meet our own and everyone else's needs. This is true for people living in the Global South, many of whom are farmers. A healthy environment allows them to continue harvesting crops from the Earth to feed themselves and their families, and also earn money.

Challenge students to come up with an idea for a project that benefits both the environment and people. Explain that through this action they are taking care of Creation to ensure that the Earth can provide basic needs and some wants for everyone, including our sisters and brothers in the Global South.

## For Students K-3

Help students understand the link between a healthy environment and people's well-being by having them participate in an environmental activity that directly benefits their community. This could be planting flowers for the local seniors' centre or in the parish yard. Explain that when we do this, our neighbourhoods become nicer places for everyone. Or you could plant a vegetable garden in part of the school yard to grow food for the local food bank. When we do this, we give up a little bit of our play area to help feed others.

## For Students 4-6

Encourage students to think of how they can reduce the number of things they ask for or buy. They could host a classroom toy-share, a clothes swap day, or a birthday party where the gift or gift-bags are climate-friendly (heritage seeds, recycled toys, or donations). These could become regular activities. Students could work with staff to create a weekly no-waste day to reduce garbage from snacks and lunches. Students could also be shown how to pack their own lunches or snacks at home in a way that reduces waste.

# PRAYER

End with the campaign prayer, where students pray that their actions will contribute to a healthy world.

### LET US CREATE A CLIMATE OF CHANGE

Lord, in the joy of your Creation,
The whole human family has received
this unique gift from you:
our planet Earth.

We sincerely thank you, Lord!

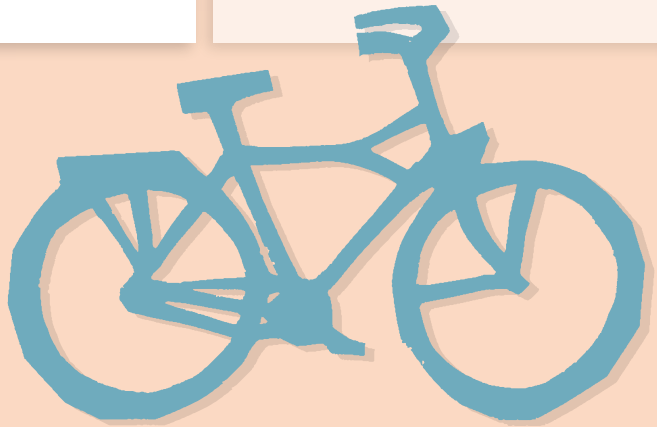
Lord, look on our Earth and
help us to recognize that it is urgent
that we act…
…for we are destroying our forests,
devastating our land,
and polluting our seas.

By doing this,
we cause changes to our climate,
and create environmental turmoil
that increase poverty
in the countries of the Global South.

We sincerely ask for forgiveness, Lord.

Yes, it is time to act…
to guide our planet
in its development
and in its peace.

*Marie-Paule Malenfant*
*Member of Development and Peace*



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devp.org | 1 888 234-8533

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