

PROTECT OUR PLANET

IT'S ELEMENTAL: AIR, LAND, WATER



Protect Our Planet

The air, land, and water around us are changing — and young people are noticing. They're asking questions, making observations, and trying to understand what these changes mean for their world. But knowing what to do with that awareness can be harder. Protect Our Planet, this year's Students Rebuild project, invites young people ages 5–25 to explore the air, land, and water around them and use creativity to share their stories and ideas for a healthier planet.

Through art, writing, performance, photography, digital media, or STEM, students will explore, create, and share. Together, their creativity supports organizations worldwide caring for the air, land, and water we all depend on.

Note to Educators

Because you know your learners and learning environment best, we encourage you to use your professional judgment when selecting, adapting, and implementing Protect Our Planet resources. We recognize that educational settings, community priorities, and local curriculum requirements vary, so please feel free to use these materials in ways that best support your learners and your teaching approach.

Overview

The connection between people and the natural world is tangible and enduring. The land shapes where we live, water sustains our communities, and the air we breathe impacts our health and well-being. Every community is defined by the natural elements that surround it, creating a unique relationship between the people and the place.

In this activity, learners become environmental storytellers by exploring one natural element—air, land, or water—that plays an important role in their community. Through observation, research, creative expression, and reflection, they will examine how this element shapes daily life, identify challenges and opportunities, and share their vision for protecting and caring for the places we call home.



Learning Objectives

Learners will:

- Notice how their community connects to nature.
- Learn how one element — air, land, or water — affects people, animals, or daily life.
- Listen to family members, friends, or neighbors and hear their ideas.
- Share what they learn through a creative project.
- Think of one way to help take care of their community.

Standards

This activity integrates learning across multiple subject areas and supports the following standards:

- **Science (NGSS):** Earth and Environmental Systems; Human Impacts on the Environment
- **English Language Arts (CCSS):** Reading Informational Text, Writing, Speaking & Listening
- **Visual & Performing Arts (NCAS):** Creating, Presenting, and Responding through Artistic Expression
- **Social Studies:** Civic Responsibility and Human–Environment Interaction
- **Social-Emotional Learning (CASEL):** Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, and Responsible Decision-Making

Materials

- A notebook or paper for drawing and writing notes
- Clipboard (if going outside)
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- A camera or tablet, if available
- A few simple books or a class-approved website about air, land, or water

**Additional materials will vary according to which option learners choose to complete during Step 3 of the activity.*

Time

Estimated Total Time: Approximately **140 – 190 minutes** (2 hours 20 minutes–3 hours 10 minutes) without the optional showcase (extension).

This activity is designed to be flexible and is intended to be completed over multiple class periods. Parts of the activity may also be omitted. The suggested times for each step are estimates and may be adjusted to meet the needs of your learners, classroom schedule, and learning goals.

Educators are encouraged to adapt the lesson as needed. You may choose to complete the entire activity or select only the sections that best fit your available instructional time and curriculum. Each step can stand alone or be combined with others, allowing learners to engage in meaningful learning whether the lesson is completed over several days or incorporated into existing classroom instruction.

Essential Question

How do the air, land, and water make our community special, and how can telling stories about them help us take better care of our world?



1

Explore Your Community | 35 - 45 minutes

Take learners outside, or ask them to explore near their home with a grown-up. Have them pick one of the following three elements to focus on: air, land, or water.

Explain that each element plays an important role in shaping communities, ecosystems, and daily life.

An **ecosystem** is a place where living things and their environment work together. Plants, animals, insects, water, air, soil, and sunlight all depend on one another to survive.

Tell learners that:

- **Air** includes the **atmosphere**, weather, and wind. It affects human health, climate, and ecosystems, while carrying sounds, scents, and seeds that shape daily life.
- **Land** includes the Earth's physical features, such as mountains, forests, deserts, parks, farms, soil, and wildlife habitats. It provides places to live, grow food, and connect with nature.
- **Water** includes oceans, rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater, and rainfall. It sustains all living things, supplies drinking water, and supports hygiene, recreation, and local ecosystems.

The **atmosphere** is the layer of air that surrounds Earth. It gives us the air we breathe, helps keep our planet warm enough for life, and is where weather like clouds, rain, snow, and wind happens.

As the learners explore, ask them to consider:

- What do you see?
- What do you hear or smell?
- How does this element make you feel?
- Why is this element important to you?
- How does this part of nature help your community?

Have learners draw a picture or write a few sentences about what they noticed.

2

Discover More About Your Element | 30 - 40 minutes

Help learners gain more understanding of the natural element they chose. Use picture books, short videos, classroom discussions, or teacher-led presentations to introduce a few interesting facts.

"Protect Our Planet: Supplemental Learning Resources for Learners ages 5-11" and "Booklist for Learners".

Encourage learners to observe carefully and share what they notice.

Ask questions such as:

- What do you notice about your chosen element?
- Where have you seen it in your community?
- Why do people, plants, or animals need it?
- How does it help your community?
- How might it harm your community?
- How can we help take care of it?

To complete this step, ask learners to share what they discovered as a class or in small groups.

Responses can be given by:

- Drawing a picture
- Sharing ideas verbally
- Writing a word, sentence, or short paragraph (depending on grade level)

Educators may collect learners' responses and display them on a board so learners can see the similarities and differences in their thoughts and observations.

3

Create | 45 - 60 minutes

After completing the initial exploration, invite learners to dive deeper by choosing one of the following creative projects.

Option 1: Nature News Report (Literary Arts)

Learners create a simple "Nature News" report about their element. They should include:

- A title
- A drawing of their element
- One or two facts they learned
- One way people can help care for it
- A hope for the future

Directions:

1. **Choose an element:** Pick air, land, or water.
2. **Learn something new:** Discover one or two interesting facts about their chosen element.
3. **Create a headline:** Give the report a fun and engaging title.
4. **Draw their element:** Add a picture that shows why the element is special. This can include natural features, organisms that live in the element, or human interactions with or benefits from the element.
5. **Share how to help:** Write one way people can care for the element. (Younger learners may draw this step.)
6. **Add a hopeful message:** Finish with one sentence about a hope for the future of Earth. (Younger learners may draw this step.)
7. **Practice the report:** Read it aloud and practice sounding like a news reporter.
8. **Share with the class:** Present the Nature News report and celebrate the learnings together.



Option 2: Tell the Story (Visual Arts)

Learners create a five-picture story about their element.

- Picture 1: My element
- Picture 2: How it helps people, plants, or animals
- Picture 3: A challenge being faced by the element
- Picture 4: How people care for the element
- Picture 5: My hope for the future

Directions:

1. **Choose the element:** Pick air, land, or water.
2. **Draw picture 1:** Show a specific example of the chosen element. For example, for water, a learner might draw a waterfall, river, lake, or ocean. For land, a learner might draw a forest, desert, or mountain. For air, a learner might draw the wind moving through trees or a kite flying in the sky.
3. **Draw picture 2:** Show how the element helps people, plants, and animals thrive.
4. **Draw picture 3:** Show one way the element is being harmed or faces a challenge.
5. **Draw picture 4:** Then show how people can help protect or care for it.
6. **Draw picture 5:** Show what the element will hopefully be like if people work together to protect and care for it.
7. **Upper elementary students may add words:** Add labels or 1-2 sentences to each drawing to explain the story.
8. **Put the pictures in order:** The pictures should tell the story of the element from beginning to end.
9. **Share the story:** Show the picture story to the class and explain what and why it was created.

Option 3: Becoming the Element (Performing Arts)

Learners imagine they are their chosen element and bring it to life through music and movement. They may create a short song, chant, dance, or spoken word piece that shows how their element moves, changes, or helps their community. After performing, learners share two sentences beginning with, "I am... People can care for me by..." (for example, *"I am the river that gives water to our town. People can care for me by not throwing their trash into me."* or *"People can care for me by planting trees that make our air healthy."*).

Directions:

1. **Choose the element:** Pick air, land, or water.
2. **Imagine life as the element:** Consider how the element moves, feels, thinks, sounds, changes, and helps living creatures survive.
3. **Create the performance:** Make a short song, chant, dance, or spoken word piece that personifies the element and brings it to life.
4. **Practice the performance:** Try performing the piece a few times.
5. **Finish with a reflection:** Add the two sentences that begin with:
 - "I am..."
 - "People can care for me by..."
6. **Perform for the class:** Share the completed piece and sentences with others.
7. **Celebrate each performance:** Listen respectfully and notice the different ways each element supports life.

Option 4: Build a Mini World (Multi-Media Arts)

Learners use recycled or classroom materials to build a small model or diorama that shows how their element is represented in the community. The diorama should explain how the element helps people, plants, or animals. It should also show how the element can be cared for and what the learner hopes for the future of their community in relation to the element.

Directions:

1. **Choose the element:** Pick air, land, or water.
2. **Plan the mini world:** Think about a place in the community where the element can be found and how it helps people, plants, or animals. Examples may be a river that supports fish, insects, and plants; a community garden that produces vegetables and fruit; or a wind farm that generates electricity for a city.
3. **Gather the materials:** Use recycled or classroom materials such as plastics, cardboard, paper, clay, fabric, natural objects, or other art supplies.
4. **Build the model:** Create a small model or diorama that shows the specific element.

Tips for building a model or diorama:

- Use a small box, shoebox, or folded piece of cardboard as the base for the diorama. It's easier to make items stand up by folding tabs or attaching them with glue or tape.
 - Create different layers by placing some objects in the front, middle, and back. This will make the mini world look more realistic and three-dimensional.
5. **Show how people can help:** Add one way people can protect and care for the element, or show a challenge it faces.
 6. **Include a hope for the future:** Add a representation of what the community could look like if people work together to take care of the element.
 7. **Share the mini world:** Present the model or diorama to the class or group and explain what it shows and why the element is important.

4

Reflect and Make a Promise | 20 - 30 minutes

Invite learners to reflect on what they learned from this project and how they can help care for the natural world.

Create a "Promise to Our Planet" display with paper leaves, raindrops, clouds, or other nature-themed shapes. Ask each learner to write or draw one promise they will make to help care for the air, land, or water.

Reflection prompts that may help:

- What did you learn about our community today?
- What surprised you?
- Why are land, water, and air important?
- What is one thing you can do to help care for the environment?
- What message do you want others to remember?

Collect the promises on a classroom bulletin board, mural, or display to create a shared reminder that everyone can make a positive difference in caring for the world around them.

5

Submit to Students Rebuild | 5 - 15 minutes

Take a photo of what your students created and share it at studentsrebuild.org. Creative Visions will donate \$5, up to \$1 million for each submission or student engaged. The project is open from September 8, 2026 - June 1, 2027.

6

Share Your Stories (Extension) | 60 - 180 minutes

Celebrate learners' creativity by allowing them to share their work with peers, families, or the community. Consider hosting a "Our Community, Our Elements" showcase where learners can present their projects in different ways.

- **Nature News Station:** Learners present their Nature News reports as reporters, sharing what they learned, how people can care for their element, and their hopes for the future.
- **Story Gallery:** Display learners' five-picture stories for a gallery walk. Invite classmates to notice what each story teaches about air, land, and water.
- **Performance Corner:** Learners perform their *Becoming the Element* songs, chants, dances, or movement pieces and introduce themselves by saying, "I am..." and "People can care for me by..."
- **Mini World Museum:** Display learners' models and dioramas. Invite learners to explain how their element helps the community, how people can care for it, and what they hope for its future.

