

PROTECT OUR PLANET

CREATIVE EXPRESSION TOOLKIT: AIR



Protect Our Planet: The Air We Share

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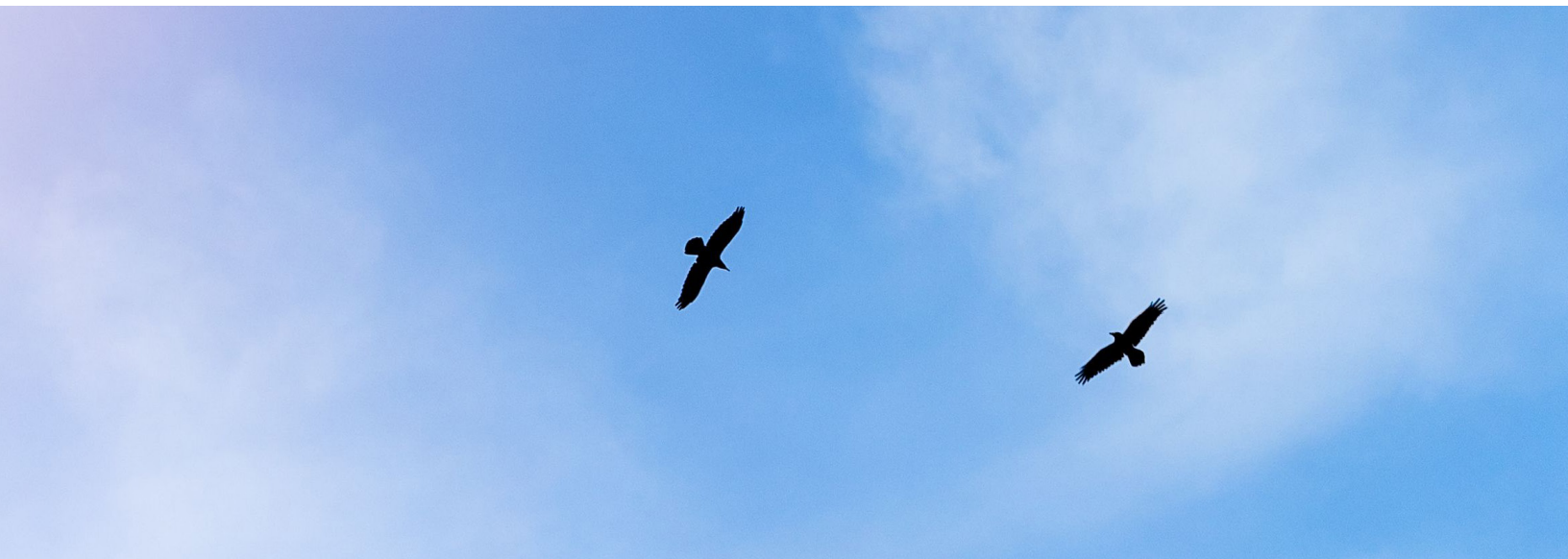
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Protect Our Planet

The air, land, and water around us are changing – and young people feel the weight of it. They're paying attention, forming opinions, imagining their futures on a changing planet. But knowing what to do with that awareness is harder. Protect Our Planet gives students a chance to learn, create, and take action. Protect Our Planet is this year's Students Rebuild project, inviting young people around the world, ages 5 – 25, to explore the air, land, and water around them — and use creativity to share their stories and vision for a thriving world.

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 around us.

The Air We Share

Every moment of every day, we breathe it, move through it, and depend on it, often without even thinking about it. The air around us is much more than empty space. It is a mixture of gases, tiny particles, water vapor, and moving currents that surround the Earth and make life possible.

Healthy air provides many of the things living organisms need to survive. It supplies the oxygen that people and animals breathe, carries pollen and seeds that help plants reproduce, shapes our weather, and helps regulate temperatures around the world. The atmosphere protects life on Earth by blocking much of the Sun's harmful radiation.

The air is constantly changing. Wind, clouds, storms, smoke, dust, pollen, and other natural events all affect the air around us. Human activities can also influence air quality in different ways, affecting the health of people, animals, and ecosystems.

Through Protect Our Planet, students are invited to explore the many stories of the air and share what they learn through creative expression. Whether creating visual art, writing, or digital media, every project helps inspire others to better understand and care for the air we all share.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is organized in three stages — Explore, Create, and Share. Together they carry learners from understanding the air we share, to making something that captures what they discovered, to sharing it with others. Use as much or as little of each stage as fits your learners and setting.

Explore. Learners investigate the air around them using four big ideas, discussion prompts, a booklist, and supplemental resources that build understanding.

Create. Learners turn what they discovered into visual art, writing, or performance, supported by the materials, creative elements, and project ideas provided.

Share. Learners exhibit their work, submit it to studentsrebuild.org, and invite their community to notice and protect the air.



1

Explore

In this section: Use the questions below to help your learners explore the element of air. Review the booklist and resources guide at the end of this section to support their discovery.

Explore the Air

The air is much more than the space around us. It is a living system that connects the atmosphere, weather, water, plants, animals, and people.

Ask your learners to consider these four big ideas about the air.

1. The Living Air

Healthy air connects living organisms.

Although we cannot usually see it, the air is filled with movement and life. Every breath we take connects us to an invisible world of gases, water vapor, pollen, seeds, microscopic organisms, and tiny particles. Birds, bats, butterflies, bees, and countless other living things depend on the air to move, find food, reproduce, and survive. Together, the atmosphere, weather, and living things create a connected system that supports life across the planet.

As your learners explore and think about the air we share, they should consider questions such as:

- What living things in their community depend on the air?
- What do they notice moving through the air each day?
- What signs tell them that the air is healthy?
- How does the air support the people, plants, and animals where they live?
- What is one thing they could do to help care for the air in their community?

2. The Air That Gives

Healthy air supports life every day.

The air provides the oxygen that people and animals need to breathe and the carbon dioxide that plants use to grow. Wind carries pollen from flower to flower and spreads seeds to new places. The atmosphere shapes weather, moves clouds and rain, helps regulate temperatures, and protects life on Earth by filtering much of the Sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation.

As your learners continue to learn about the air we share, they should consider questions such as:

- How does the air help people, plants, and animals survive?
- What affects the air quality in their community?
- How does the atmosphere influence the weather where they live?
- Why is clean air important to their community?

3. When the Air Is Changed

When the air changes, life changes.

The air we share changes over time in numerous ways. Sometimes, the change is a natural process, and sometimes the change is caused by human activities.

As your learners study the changes in the air around them, they should consider which of the following processes might have contributed:

- Weather and storms
- Smoke
- Dust
- Pollen
- Wildfires
- Volcanic eruptions
- Air pollution
- Vehicle emissions
- Reforesting

Additional questions to consider:

- How do air quality changes affect people?
- How do they affect plants and animals?
- How do these changes affect the quality of life in their community?

4. The Air We Shape

Our choices help shape the air every day.

Planting trees, conserving energy, reducing unnecessary pollution, protecting green spaces, and choosing cleaner forms of transportation when possible are all ways people can help improve the air we share. Even small actions can support healthier communities, protect wildlife, and help ensure that clean air continues to support life for future generations.

As your learners consider ways in which they and their communities can shape the air they share, they should think about these questions:

- How can one person make a difference?
- How can a community make a difference?
- What is one action they could take to help care for the air where they live?
- What is one step they would like to see their community take to improve the air they share?



Booklist

Use the books below to help your learners answer the questions above and more!

[Our Air](#) By G. Brian Karas | Ages 3-7

A picture book introducing young readers to the concept of air as an invisible, life-sustaining resource that makes up the atmosphere protecting our planet. Through vivid illustrations and simple text, it emphasizes that because everyone on Earth shares this air, taking care of it is a shared responsibility.

[The Air We Share: A Pollution Problem and Finding Ways to Fix It](#) By Dee Romito, Illustrated by Mariona Cabassa | Ages 6-9

This nonfiction picture book explores how air connects every person, animal, and place on the planet, then traces where air pollution comes from and how it affects our health and environment.

[The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind](#) By William Kamkwamba & Bryan Mealer | Ages 9-12

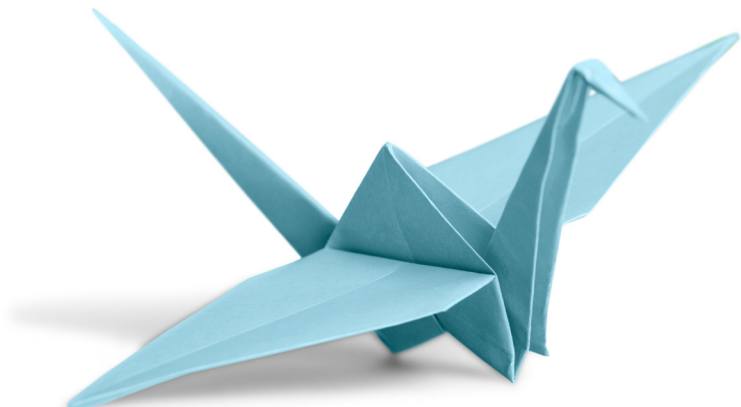
The true story of a teenager in Malawi who taught himself engineering to bring electricity and water irrigation to his family's farm. A firsthand account of resilience in the face of crisis, showing students how curiosity and persistence can turn hardship into real, community-changing solutions.

[The Carbon Diaries By Staci Lloyd](#) | Ages 14+

In the year 2015, as global warming began to take a large toll on the environment, the UK became the first country to incorporate carbon rationing. Sixteen-year-old Laura Brown attempts to maintain her teenage lifestyle as her world goes up in flames, socially and literally.

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.



Supplemental Resources

Use the resources below to help your learners answer the questions above and more!

Age	Name	Description
4+	AirNow.gov : Air Quality Resources For Teachers AirNow.gov	The EPA's official air quality website, offering the U.S. Air Quality Index (AQI), a color-coded daily tool that reports air quality by area, indicating who is most affected. The education page includes resources for teachers and students including the Air Quality Flag Program and printable picture books.
5+	Learning and Teaching about the Environment US Environmental Protection Agency	An array of environmental and science-based lesson plans, activities and ideas below from EPA, other federal agencies and external organizations. Includes classroom resources and project ideas for teachers, as well as homework help on environmental topics for students.
5 - 10	GLOBE program: Air Quality Module	In this story-based module, students will investigate how air pollution alters the sky's color, create models to show how aerosols influence visibility, and use prisms to explore different light properties.
8+	National Wildlife Federation: teach 10 hours for Climate	The National Wildlife Federation provides resources, tools, worksheets, curriculums and activities about climate change.
11+	Greta Thunberg: Save the World by Changing the Rules TEDxStockholm Bandi Guan: Climate change - from one kid to another TED Talk Samadrita B: Children as leaders and torch-bearers for climate change awareness TED Talk	Ted Talks: Voices of youth speaking to one another about the climate crisis.
14+	Air Quality and Energy Choice STEM Activities for Educators US EPA	These hands-on activities were developed by EPA researchers for teachers and others to use in the classroom and other educational settings to teach students about air quality and climate change.

2

Create

In this section: Now that you've explored air, it's time to create! Pick one or more of the ideas below to help your learners put their insights into action - or make up your own activity! Whatever you do, remember to submit the project at studentsrebuild.org to spark a \$5 donation to organizations protecting the planet.

Working with Older Students

The project ideas that follow can be adapted for learners of all ages. Older students may choose to explore more sophisticated approaches within their chosen discipline. Visual artists might experiment with sculpture, papier-mâché, mixed media, ceramics, photography, or digital illustration. Writers may develop poems, narratives, or graphic stories. Media artists might produce documentaries, podcasts, animations, or public service announcements.

We can't wait to see what you create!

Materials

There are countless ways to participate in the Protect Our Planet project. Some projects require only paper and pencils, while others may incorporate digital tools or recycled materials.

For students creating visual artwork, we encourage the use of upcycled and recycled materials whenever possible.

Want to reduce waste and share your project?

Photograph, scan, or record your finished project before submitting it to studentsrebuild.org. For a wider local reach, consider displaying artwork, sharing writing, or screening media projects at school, in a local library, or at a community center to encourage others to appreciate and protect local habitats.

Creative Elements

Whether students choose visual arts, literary arts, or media arts, encourage them to think carefully about how creative choices help communicate ideas.

Visual Arts

- Shape and Form
- Color, Value, and Texture
- Scale
- Movement

Literary Arts

- Voice
- Imagery
- Perspective
- Word Choice

Media Arts

- Storytelling
- Composition
- Sound
- Pacing
- Audience

Process

Promote healthy creative behaviors, problem solving, and 21st century skills by engaging your students in these practices:

Problem solve and explore

Creating can require problem-solving, iterations, and experimentation. Allow your students time and space to play with and explore the materials to discover what will work best in making their art.

Collaborate

Consider having students work in pairs or small groups to create several organisms. Teamwork and artistic collaboration can help students brainstorm creative ideas, facilitate informal dialogue about the organism and the environmental issues it faces, and encourage peer-to-peer learning and motivation.

Stretch and take risks

We know that making art may cause discomfort and can be a vulnerable experience. Create a respectful, safe space for students to take risks and stretch their abilities by avoiding negative judgments and by not defining a “right” or “wrong” way for student artwork to look. Focus on positive artistic behaviors instead of visual outcomes.

Persist

Students’ creations might not match their vision at first, or materials and techniques might not work out as planned. Provide constructive feedback and supportive reassurance to help students persist and work through creative or artistic challenges.

Students Rebuild is designed to enable youth to address pressing global issues through a creative call to action. We value the thoughtfulness, creativity, effort, and learning that go into the artwork of all our young people.



Note: Unlike the rest of this guide, the activities below address students directly rather than educators. Share them as written, or adapt as needed.

Creative Project Idea #1: Visual Arts

Air in Motion

The air is always around us, but most of the time we cannot see it. We cannot see the wind itself, the oxygen we breathe, pollen drifting from flower to flower, or the tiny particles that affect the quality of the air we share. Yet we can see the effects of air everywhere. Birds soar on invisible currents. Trees bend in the wind. Clouds move across the sky. Flowers bloom because pollinators travel through the air. Every breath reminds us that air connects all living things.

Artists often help us notice things that are hidden. In this activity, your challenge is to make the invisible quality of air visible.

Create a three-dimensional sculpture that reveals an unseen story about the air. Use shape, color, texture, movement, light, and recycled materials to help your audience see something that normally cannot be seen. Your artwork should invite viewers to think differently about the air we share and why it matters.

Directions

1. Choose Your Invisible Story

Think about an important part of the air that people cannot usually see. What invisible process or force would you like to reveal through your sculpture?

You might explore:

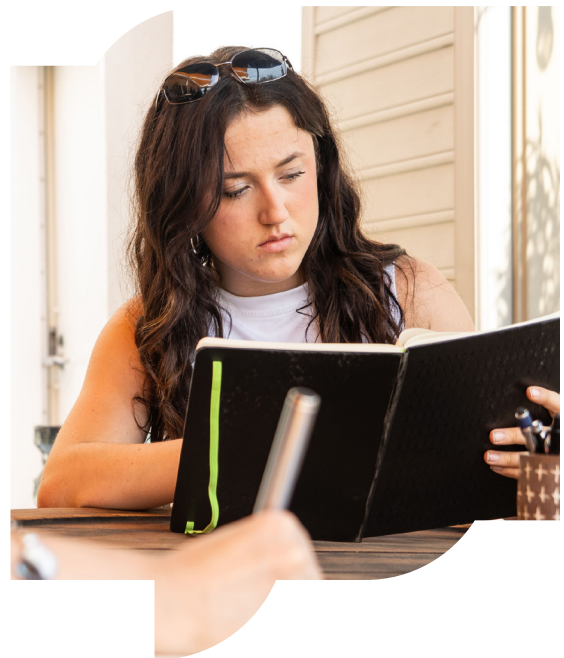
- Oxygen moving between plants, animals, and people
- Carbon dioxide absorbed by trees and forests
- Pollen drifting through the air to help plants reproduce
- Seeds traveling on the wind to grow in new places
- Air carrying the scents of flowers, forests, or the ocean
- Tiny particles that affect air quality
- Warm and cool air creating clouds and storms
- The movement of migrating birds, butterflies, or bats using air currents
- Any unseen process that shows how air supports life

2. Investigate

Learn about your topic by reading books, exploring reliable websites, observing nature, or talking with members of your community.

As you investigate, think about:

- What is happening that people cannot normally see?
- How does this invisible process support life?
- What causes it to happen?
- How does it affect people, plants, animals, or ecosystems?
- What do you want viewers to notice or understand after seeing your sculpture?



3. Plan Your Sculpture

Sketch your ideas before you begin building.

Continue to think about the invisible story you are revealing by paying close attention to the creative elements that will help viewers “see” something that is normally hidden.

Consider:

- How transparent, suspended, layered, or moving materials could help communicate your idea
- Color, texture, scale, and movement represent something we cannot see
- Whether your sculpture will be realistic, symbolic, or abstract

4. Build Your Sculpture

Gather your materials and bring your invisible story to life.

Consider using:

- Recycled cardboard, paper tubes, plastic containers, or bottle caps
- Wire, fishing line, string, or clear thread to suspend objects in space
- Tissue paper, fabric, ribbon, or cellophane to suggest flowing air
- Twigs, feathers, leaves, or seed pods collected responsibly
- Paint, collage materials, or translucent objects to create layers
- Hanging or kinetic elements that move naturally when air passes by

As you build, ask yourself:

- Can someone understand the invisible process I am revealing?
- How does my sculpture show movement or change?
- What details help explain the unseen forces at work?
- What emotions or questions do I want viewers to experience?

5. Reflect

When your sculpture is complete, reflect on your artistic choices.

Consider:

- What invisible part of the air did I choose to reveal?
- Which artistic techniques helped make the unseen visible?
- What did I learn about the air while creating my sculpture?
- How does my artwork encourage others to appreciate or protect the air we share?

6. Present Your Sculpture

Display your sculpture in your classroom, school, library, or community space. Give your artwork a title and write a short artist statement explaining the invisible story your sculpture reveals and why it matters.

Creative Project Idea #2: Literary Arts

If the Air Could Speak...

The air is always with us, yet most of the time we hardly notice it. It carries every breath we take, moves clouds across the sky, spreads the scent of blooming flowers, powers storms and gentle breezes, and connects people, plants, animals, and places around the world.

Imagine you could hear a voice from the air we share. What story would it tell?

Write a creative piece from the first-person perspective, giving a voice to one part of the air or an invisible process that depends on it. You might become the wind, a breeze, oxygen, a cloud, a drifting seed, a grain of pollen, or even the atmosphere itself. Tell the story of what you have experienced, the role you play in supporting life, and what you wish people understood about the air we all share.

Choose One Format

- Narrative story
- Series of journal entries
- Poem(s)
- Children's book
- Graphic story or comic
- Letter(s)

Directions

1. Choose Your Voice

Select something connected to the air we share whose story you would like to tell.

Think about the role your first-person narrator plays and the experiences it has as it moves through the world.

Consider these possibilities:

- A gentle breeze bringing relief on a hot day
- A powerful storm forming and moving across the sky
- A cloud traveling with the weather
- A raindrop beginning its journey in the atmosphere
- Oxygen moving from plants to people and animals with every breath
- Carbon dioxide traveling from people and animals to plants
- A dandelion seed floating on the wind to find a new home
- A butterfly or bee using the air to travel between flowers
- The atmosphere protecting Earth from the Sun's harmful rays
- A tiny air pollutant describing how it affects people and the environment
- The scent of a flower or forest carried through the air



2. Investigate

Learn about your topic by reading books, exploring reliable websites, observing nature, talking with community members, or watching the weather around you.

As you investigate, consider questions such as:

- How is my topic connected to the air?
- What role does it play in supporting life?
- How does it move or change over time?
- What natural processes or human activities influence it?
- What facts will help me tell an authentic story?

3. Imagine Its Story

Now that you have learned about your topic, imagine what it would say if it could speak.

As you prepare to write, consider questions such as these to develop the narrator's voice:

- Who is the narrator, and what role do they play in the air we share?
- What do they experience each day?
- What might they feel as they move, change, or are changed?
- What changes have they witnessed over time?
- What challenges do they face?
- What do they wish people understood about them?
- If they could ask people to do one thing to care for the air, what would it be?

4. Write

Create an original piece from your narrator's point of view.

As you write, remember to:

- Stay in the first-person point of view.
- Use vivid sensory details and descriptive language.
- Show your narrator's thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- Weave accurate scientific information into your story.
- Help readers understand why your narrator matters and why protecting the air is important.

5. Finishing Touches

Before sharing your work with others:

- Read your writing aloud and make revisions to improve clarity, organization, description, and emotion.
- Give your work a creative title.
- If appropriate, add illustrations, maps, diagrams, or decorative borders that help tell your story.

6. Inspire Others

Include a short author's note explaining:

- Why you chose this topic
- One thing you learned
- One action readers can take to help care for the air we share

Creative Project Idea #3: Media Arts/Visual Arts

One Breath: The Story of Our Shared Air

Every breath you take is part of an incredible story. The oxygen you breathe may have been released by a tree, a field of grass, or tiny ocean plants. As you exhale, the carbon dioxide you release helps plants grow. The same air is shared by people, animals, plants, and ecosystems around the world. Every breath reminds us that we are all connected through the living system of the atmosphere.

In this activity, create a physical or digital collage that tells the story of one breath. Through layers of images, textures, colors, words, symbols, and other visual elements, illustrate the journey of a single breath and the many connections it creates. Your collage should help viewers understand how the air supports life and inspire them to care for the air we all share.

Directions

1. Imagine One Breath

Imagine following a single breath as it moves through the world. Where does it begin? Where does it travel? Who or what does it connect?

Your collage might tell the story of:

- A breath traveling from a forest to a person
- Oxygen produced by plants or ocean phytoplankton
- Carbon dioxide returning to plants
- A tree helping clean the air
- The connection between clean air, healthy people, and thriving ecosystems
- Another story that shows how one breath connects life on Earth

2. Investigate

Learn about your topic by reading books, exploring reliable websites, observing nature, or talking with members of your community.

As you investigate, consider questions such as:

- Where does this breath begin, and where might it travel?
- How do oxygen and carbon dioxide move between living things?
- What plants, animals, or ecosystems are connected through this breath?
- What natural processes, such as photosynthesis, respiration, pollination, or weather, are part of its journey?
- How do human activities help or harm the quality of the air we breathe?
- What surprising connection do I want viewers to discover through my collage?

3. Plan Your Collage

Sketch your ideas before you begin creating.

Think about:

- What journey or connection will my collage show?
- What images best tell my story?
- How can layers help reveal connections that are normally invisible?
- What colors, textures, symbols, or words will strengthen my message?
- How will I guide the viewer's eye through the story?

4. Create Your Collage

Create a physical or digital collage that tells the story of one breath.

Items you might use:

Physical Collage

- Magazine or newspaper clippings
- Photographs
- Drawings or paintings
- Recycled paper, tissue paper, or fabric
- Natural materials collected responsibly
- String, yarn, or thread to show connections
- Printed or handwritten words and labels

Digital Collage

- Original photographs
- Digital illustrations
- Scanned drawings
- Images, icons, and graphic elements
- Layers of overlapping elements
- Digital textures, colors, and shapes
- Arrows, captions, or labels that show how one breath connects living things

As you create, ask yourself:

- Does my collage clearly show how one breath connects people, plants, animals, and ecosystems?
- Have I included layers or visual connections that reveal something people don't usually notice?
- Does my artwork inspire viewers to appreciate and protect the air we share?

5. Reflect

Write a short artist statement that answers the following questions:

- What story does your collage tell?
- What did you learn while creating it?
- What connections do you hope viewers notice?
- Why is protecting clean air important?

6. Present Your Collage

Display your collage with your artist statement in your classroom, school, library, or community space.

As you view one another's work, discuss:

- What journey did this collage illustrate?
- What new connections did you notice?
- How did the artist use images, colors, textures, or layers to communicate their message?



3

Share

In this section: You've explored and created - now it's time to share! Use the showcase below to bring your learners' work into the world and celebrate what they discovered about air.

Remember to submit each project at studentsrebuild.org to spark a \$5 donation to organizations protecting the planet.

Extension Activity: Every Breath Connects Us

Transform your classroom, library, or school hallway into a **Caring for the Air We Share Showcase** by displaying learners' artwork, writing, and media projects. Do not feel limited to only the activities described in this guide.

The exhibition might include:

- Journal entries, short stories or poems
- Hanging mobile-like sculptures or models
- Mixed-media collages with recycled materials
- Digital illustrations or collages
- Spoken word, dance, or musical performances

Celebrate and Inspire

Invite learners, families, and community members to explore the gallery and discover the many visible and invisible ways air connects life on Earth. Encourage students to explain what they learned about the air that we share through their artwork, writing, and performances.

As visitors view the projects, encourage them to reflect on these questions:

- What new connection about the air did you discover?
- Which project helped you see something you had never noticed before?
- Why is clean air important for people, plants, animals, and ecosystems?
- What is one action you can take to help protect the air we share?

Conclude the exhibition by inviting each visitor to complete an **Every Breath Connects Us** Pledge beginning with:

Because every breath connects us, I will...

Display the pledges alongside the student work to inspire others to take action and care for the air we all share.

Submit

Once students have completed their projects, don't forget to submit photos or videos showcasing their creative expressions to Students Rebuild at studentsrebuild.org.