

PROTECT OUR PLANET

CREATIVE EXPRESSION TOOLKIT: LAND



Protect Our Planet: The Land Beneath Our Feet

Contents

[Part 1: Explore](#)

Explore the Air

Booklist

Supplemental Resources

Note to Educators

[Part 2: Create](#)

Working with Older Students

Materials

Creative Elements

Process

Project 1: The Land Beneath Us (Visual Arts)

Project 2: If I Could Speak (Literary Arts)

Project 3: Stories from the Land (Media Arts)

[Part 3: Share](#)

Extension Activity: Our Living Land Exhibition

Celebrate and Inspire

Submit



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 Land Beneath Our Feet

Every day, we move across the land, build on it, grow food from it, and depend on it for so much more, often without giving it much thought. The land beneath our feet is much more than dirt. It includes living soil, forests, grasslands, mountains, deserts, farms, parks, and subsequently countless habitats that support life around the world.

Healthy land provides the foundation for thriving communities. It grows much of our food, filters and stores water, provides materials for shelter and medicine, regulates our climate, supports diverse plants and animals, and offers places where people can live, learn, work, and play.

Like any shared resource, the land can be cared for or neglected. Erosion, pollution, habitat loss, waste, wildfires, and other changes can affect the health of the land and the living things that depend on it. When we care for the land, we help create healthier communities for people and wildlife alike.

Through Protect Our Planet, young learners are invited to explore the many stories of the land and share what they discover through creative expression. Whether creating visual art, writing, or digital media, every project submitted to Protect Our Planet encourages others to appreciate, understand, and care for the living land beneath our feet.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is organized in three stages — Explore, Create, and Share. Together they carry learners from understanding the land beneath their feet, 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 land.



1

Explore

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

Explore the Land

The land is much more than the ground we stand on. It is a living system that connects soil, water, plants, animals, fungi, and people.

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

1. The Living Land

Healthy land is full of life.

Beneath every step is a hidden world of living organisms. A single handful of healthy soil may contain bacteria, fungi, worms, insects, and billions of microscopic organisms that break down nutrients, enrich the soil, and help plants grow. Together, they form the foundation of healthy ecosystems, making it possible for forests to flourish, crops to grow, wildlife to thrive, and communities to prosper.

As learners explore and think about the land beneath their feet, they should ask questions such as:

- What kinds of plants, animals, fungi, or other living things share the land where they live?
- What is the land in their community like? Is it a forest, desert, grassland, farmland, neighborhood, park, or something else?
- What signs tell them that the land is healthy? Are there signs that suggest it could be healthier?
- How do people in their community depend on the land every day?
- What is one thing they could do to help care for the land where they live?

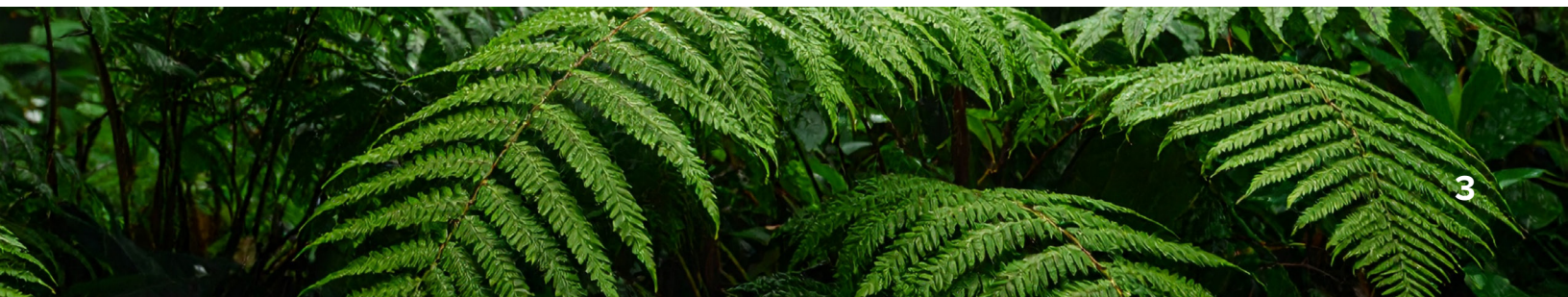
2. The Land That Gives

Healthy land supports life every day.

The land grows our food, stores and filters water, provides natural materials, supports recreation, provides places that are important to communities, and creates habitats where living things can thrive.

As your learners continue to think about the land beneath their feet, they should ask questions such as:

- Does food come from this land? If so, how does it come from the land?
- How does healthy soil help plants grow?
- How does the land support its community?
- Why are parks, forests, farms, and open spaces important?



3. When the Land Is Changed

As the land changes, so does the life it supports.

Over time, the land beneath our feet changes in numerous ways. Sometimes change is a natural process; sometimes the change is caused by human activities.

As your learners study the changes of the land beneath their feet, they should consider which of the following processes might have contributed to the changes in the land:

- Erosion
- Litter and waste
- Pollution
- Habitat loss
- Invasive species
- Wildfires
- Landfills
- Loss of green space

Also, learners should consider these questions:

- How do these changes affect people?
- How do they affect plants and animals?
- How do these changes affect its community?

4. The Land We Shape

Our choices help shape the land every day.

Planting native species, reducing waste, composting, restoring habitats, protecting green spaces, and caring for healthy soil are all ways people can help keep the land healthy. Even small actions can support wildlife, improve the places where we live, and help ensure that the land continues to provide food, clean water, and habitats for future generations.

As your learners consider ways in which they and their communities can shape the land beneath their feet, 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 land where they live?
- What is one step they would like to see the community take to shape the land?



Booklist

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

[On Our Nature Walk](#) By Jillian Roberts, Illustrated by Jane Heinrichs | Ages 3-6

A child and adult explore nature together while observing plants, animals, and the changing environment. The story encourages curiosity and appreciation for the natural world.

[Thank You, Garden](#) By Liz Garton Scanlon, Illustrated by Simone Shin | Ages 4-8

A family plants, cares for, and enjoys a garden together. The story highlights gratitude for nature and where our food comes from.

[Wangari's Trees of Peace: A True Story from Africa](#) By Jeanette Winter | Ages 5-9

This true story of Wangari Maathai, environmentalist and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, is a shining example of how one woman's passion, vision, and determination inspired great change.

[Rewilding: Giving Nature a Second Chance](#) By Jane Drake and Ann Love | Ages 9-12

The book focuses on the belief that even the smallest efforts can greatly impact the dwindling numbers, alongside the quality of life of animals. From pandas and peregrine falcons to jaguars and wolves, the story of these animals testifies that with good management, species extinction can be avoided.

[Wings in the Wild](#) By Margarita Engle | Ages 12-17

When a hurricane exposes Soleida's hidden family sculpture garden in Cuba, they are arrested for its political message, leaving her to escape to Central America, where she meets Dariel, a Cuban American boy, and together they work to protect the environment and bring attention to the imprisoned artists in Cuba.

[Seedfolks](#) By Paul Fleischman, Illustrated by Judy Pederson | Ages 9-13

Neighbors from different backgrounds come together through a community garden. The story explores how caring for the land can bring people together.

[The Words in My Hands](#) By Asphyxia | Ages 13-16

In a time of food scarcity, environmental collapse, and political corruption, Piper, a deaf teenager, is more focused on her own survival. But she finds that a new world opens up, one where Deafness is something to celebrate, and where resilience means taking action, building a community, and believing in something better.

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
5 - 10	Land Pollution for Kids	This resource provides engaging yet simple, hands-on activities and projects that help kids explore what happens to waste and how land pollution affects the world around them.
5+	NWF Green Hour	Each week, the National Wildlife Federation provides two new activities to get youth having fun experiences outside! Each activity can be completed in 15 or 30 minute segments, but it is best to spend a Green Hour®.
11+	Classroom Investigations Bureau of Land Management	Classroom guides and activities to help students understand resource areas, multiple-use land management, and how citizens can affect land use decisions.
11 - 14	GARDEN LESSON PLAN: SOIL The Nature Conservancy	A lesson plan from the Nature Conservancy teaching how soils help to regulate water, sustain plant and animal life, filter pollutants, cycle nutrients, and support structures.
14+	Recording The Rainforest	In this video, students will explore a compelling question: How can we use science and acoustic technology to care for the land and protect the plants and animals in one of the world's most biodiverse regions?
14+	Wildlife and Climate Change Educator Resources WWF	This educator resource is available in English and Spanish to help students understand climate change and adaptation as well as wildlife vulnerability.

2

Create

In this section: Now that you've explored land, 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 challenge. 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 learners' projects?

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

The Land Beneath Us

Create a three-dimensional artwork or series of sculptures that tells a story about the land. Your artwork may showcase living organisms that live on the land, explore healthy soil, highlight an important habitat, show how people care for the land, or illustrate a challenge facing a place upon which humans depend.

Your creative expression might take many forms, such as:

- Papier-mâché plants, animals, fungi, or insects
- A cross-section of healthy soil showing the life beneath the surface
- A healthy and damaged landscape with emphasis on the differences
- A habitat or ecosystem diorama
- A community garden or local park
- A sculpture created from recycled materials that explores waste and landfills

Materials

Materials will vary depending on the type of artwork you choose to create. Possible materials include:

- Newspaper or scrap paper
- Cardboard
- Masking tape
- Papier-mâché paste (flour and water or diluted white glue)
- Paint and paintbrushes
- Markers or colored pencils
- Recycled materials, such as egg cartons, paper towel tubes, tissue paper, bottle caps, and small boxes
- Clay, modeling dough, or air-dry clay (optional)
- Natural materials, such as leaves, twigs, pinecones, stones, or seed pods
- Other sculptural materials available in your classroom or community

Directions

1. Choose Your Topic

Decide what story you want to tell about the land.

You might focus on

- A plant, animal, fungus, or insect
- Healthy soil
- A local habitat
- A favorite outdoor place
- How people use the land
- A way people care for or restore the land
- A challenge affecting the land in your community



2. Investigate

Learn about your topic by reading books, exploring reliable websites, observing nature, talking with community members, or, when possible, visiting a local park or natural area.

Gather facts, photographs, sketches, or observations that will help you create an accurate and meaningful artwork.

3. Plan Your Artwork

Sketch your idea.

Think about:

- Shape
- Form
- Texture
- Color
- Scale

4. Collect (recycled) Materials

Gather materials that fit your idea, such as newspaper, cardboard, paper towel tubes, egg cartons, or other clean household items. Also, gather any art supplies you will need, such as paint, glue, pencils, and markers.

Think about how the materials, textures, shapes, and colors can help communicate your message and bring your artwork to life.

5. Build Your Sculpture

Papier-mâché is one option for creating a three-dimensional sculpture. If you choose this technique, follow the steps below. You may also choose another sculptural medium, such as clay, wire, cardboard, recycled materials, fiber, or natural materials, depending on the resources available and the story you want to tell.

Papier-mâché Instructions:

- Crumple newspaper into the basic shape of your sculpture. Secure the pieces with masking tape to create a sturdy base. This is called an armature.
- If needed, add branches, leaves, stems, wings, legs, tails, rocks, hills, or other features using rolled newspaper, cardboard, or other recycled materials before applying the papier-mâché.
- Mix 1 cup of flour with 2 cups of water until smooth. Add a little more water if needed to create a thin paste. White glue mixed with an equal amount of water also works well.
- Tear newspaper into strips. Dip each strip lightly into the paste, removing any excess. Cover the armature with overlapping strips, smoothing them as you work. Apply two or three layers to make the sculpture strong.
- Allow the sculpture to dry completely before painting and decorating.

6. Share Your Learning

Display your artwork with a short artist statement that explains:

- What you created and what inspired your idea.
- What you discovered about the land, soil, habitat, or living things featured in your artwork.
- How your artwork tells a story about the land and why that story matters.
- One action people can take to help care for the land in their own community.

Creative Project Idea #2: Literary Arts

If I Could Speak...

Imagine you could hear a voice from the land. What story would it tell?

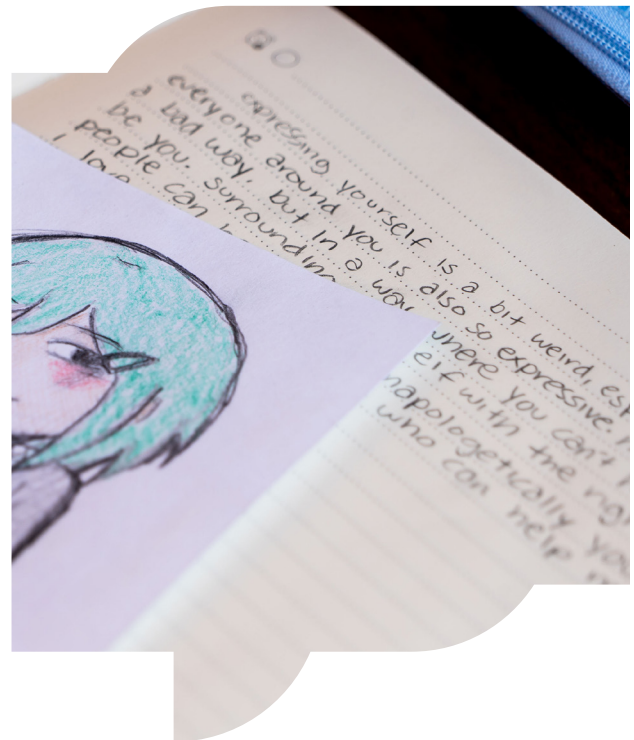
In this activity, you will write from the perspective of something connected to the land, giving it a voice to help others better understand its importance. Through your writing, you can inspire readers to appreciate the land, recognize the ways it supports life, and consider how we can all help care for the places we share.

Your writing will be told from the first-person perspective, and your narrator might be:

- A plant
- An animal
- A fungus
- Healthy soil
- A forest
- A mountain
- A riverbank
- A community garden
- A piece of litter
- An old tree
- A handful of topsoil
- A local park

Before you begin, choose your genre:

- Poem
- Diary entry
- Letter to humans
- Short story
- Children's book
- Comic or graphic story



Directions

1. Choose Your Voice

Every part of the land has a story to share. A towering tree, a handful of healthy soil, a mountain, a community garden, or even a forgotten piece of litter has witnessed change over time and is connected to the world around it.

Choose something connected to the land whose story you would like to tell.

2. Investigate

Learn about your topic by reading books, exploring reliable websites, observing nature, talking with community members, or, when possible, visiting a local park or natural area.

As you investigate, consider questions such as:

- How does your subject contribute to healthy land?
- How does it support the people, plants, animals, or other living things around it?
- How has it changed over time, either naturally or because of human activities?
- What challenges or opportunities affect its ability to thrive?
- How do people's choices influence its health and future?
- What can we learn from its story about caring for the land we all share?

3. Find Your Voice

Now imagine your subject could speak. What would it want people to know?

Use these questions to think about its experiences, the role it plays in the land, and the message it wants to share.

- What is my life like each day?
- What do I see, hear, or experience?
- Who or what depends on me?
- What changes have I witnessed over time?
- What brings me hope?
- What worries me?
- If people understood my story, what would I want them to remember?

4. Tell Your Story

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

Bring your narrator to life by using descriptive language, sensory details, and emotion. Help your audience understand not only what your narrator experiences, but also why the story matters.

As you write, consider including:

- What makes the narrator's story unique?
- How is the narrator connected to the land and the living things around it?
- What challenges has it faced?
- What lessons has it learned?
- What does it hope for the future?
- What action can people take to help care for the land?

5. Finishing Touches

Before sharing your work with others:

- Read your writing aloud and revise it to improve clarity, organization, description, and emotion. Make sure your narrator's voice remains consistent throughout your piece and that your writing clearly communicates what you learned about the land.
- Give your work a creative title.
- If appropriate, add illustrations, diagrams, maps, or decorative borders that strengthen your story.

6. Inspire Others

Include a short author's note that answers these questions:

- Why did you choose this narrator?
- What was the most interesting thing you learned while creating your piece?
- What do you hope readers will think about or do after reading your work?

Creative Project Idea #3: Media Arts

Stories from the Land

Every place has a story to tell. Through digital storytelling, you can help others discover why healthy land matters and inspire them to care for the places we all share. Create a media project that informs, inspires, and encourages others to better understand the land through its people, plants, animals, habitats, or communities.

Choose A Format

- Short documentary
- Public service announcement (PSA)
- Stop motion animation
- Podcast
- Narrated slideshow
- Video essay

Directions

1. Choose Your Story

Select a topic connected to the land that you would like to share with others.

Your project might explore:

- A local habitat
- Healthy soil
- A community garden
- A favorite park or natural area
- A wild neighbor
- Native plants
- A recycling or composting effort
- A habitat restoration project
- Reducing litter or protecting green spaces
- A local conservation effort

Choose a topic that helps your audience better understand why healthy land is important.

2. Investigate

Learn about your topic by reading books, exploring reliable websites, observing nature, interviewing community members, or visiting a local park or natural area when possible.

Gather interesting facts, photographs, artwork, video clips, interviews, or recordings that will help your audience better understand your story.

As you research, consider questions such as:

- Why is this place, organism, or project important to the land?
- How does it support healthy land?
- What challenges or opportunities does it face?
- How do people interact with it?
- What can others learn from its story?



3. Plan Your Project

Decide what message you want your audience to remember after watching or listening to your project.

Create a storyboard or outline that organizes your ideas into a clear beginning, middle, and ending.

Think about how you will introduce your topic, explain why it matters, and encourage others to appreciate and care for the land.

4. Create Your Project

Produce a one to three-minute digital story using your chosen format.

Include:

- Accurate facts supported by your research.
- Original photographs, artwork, video clips, or recordings whenever possible.
- Narration, interviews, music, or sound effects that strengthen your story.
- A clear beginning, middle, and ending that keeps your audience engaged.

5. Encourage Action

End your project by inviting your audience to take one simple action that helps care for the land.

For example, encourage viewers or listeners to:

- Plant native species.
- Reduce waste.
- Compost food scraps.
- Help care for parks and gardens.
- Learn about local plants and wildlife.



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 Land.

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

Extension Activity: Our Living Land Exhibition

Invite students to combine their projects into a collaborative exhibition celebrating the many ways healthy land supports life. Do not feel limited to only the activities described in this guide.

The exhibition might include:

- Artwork and sculptures
- Poems, letters, and stories
- Documentaries and narrated slideshows
- Soil models
- Gallery walks
- QR codes linking to digital projects

Students might organize their work around the four themes explored in this guide:

- The Living Land
- The Land That Gives
- When the Land Is Changed
- The Land We Shape

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.

Conclude the exhibition with a **Promises to the Land** display. Invite each student to write one promise describing how they will help care for the land in their home, school, or community.

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.