

Green Matters Essay

By Christina Vietinghoff

Fredericton High School

Action is needed now to stop the destruction of the world's environment, namely the ecological meltdown and catastrophic climate change. There are many actions I currently take and encourage others to do, as well as actions I only dream of. Given the opportunity, I would make many changes personally and set many projects and activities into motion. I *would* create long term positive change for the environment.

Home is where the heart is, it's also where I would begin my journey of greening the world. I would want my home to be a pioneer for all kinds of innovative environmental projects. First of all I would want my house to be completely off the grid! That means passive solar heating via maximal window usage strategically facing the sun and solar panels all over my roof. Included in this goal would be efficient insulation and all lights would be Compact Florescent Light bulbs (CFLs) to reduce my energy consumption. All showerheads would be low flow and I would have no leaky taps in order to maximize water conservation.

My house would be within biking distance from downtown so I could sustainably commute for any errands. Any time I couldn't bike, I would rely on public transportation and car pooling. All my clothing would be bought supporting local businesses, preferably locally made as well. All cosmetic products such as shampoos or house cleaners would be organic, containing no harmful chemicals such as phthalates that could poison my personal environment as well as leak into the soil.

In order to reduce my consumption and waste I would recycle and compost anything I could! Examples of this would include borrowing books from the library instead of buying them. I would also use reusable cloth bags at all times and carry around

a reusable water bottle. I would start an indoor worm composting system in order to compost year round.

All lawn space would be considered an opportunity for biodiversity to flourish! That means absolutely no pesticides. Important trees such as butternuts or bur oaks would be planted around my house to provide a habitat for all kinds of creatures. A large and comprehensive garden would provide organic food. Any food that I could not produce myself would be bought locally and fair trade certified. My garden would be watered with vegetable stock and I would have many flowers such as bee balm to attract pollinators like bees.

My environmental actions at home would be magnified in my school. Monthly consultations between a Parent-Teacher-Student committee would occur to brainstorm and implement actions to reduce the school's energy consumption, waste production and general carbon footprint. The environment would be included in the *entire* curriculum not just biology courses. We'd write environmental poetry in English, experience nature first hand in gym class and we'd even calculate our water consumption in math class!

Recycling bins and composting would be available everywhere! It would be the plain old garbage cans that would be hard to find. No plastic water bottles would be sold anywhere. Plenty of bike racks and bike lanes would be present and students and staff that carpooled would receive preferable parking spots. While courses are in session, lights in the hallways would be dimmed and all computers would be turned off at night.

The cafeteria would sell local, organic and fair trade food only! There would be limited packaging and only reusable plates and cutlery would be available. Special clubs such as gardening club would provide some fruits and vegetables for the cafeteria to sell.

All paper would be double sided and recycled. Instead of copying notes we would receive copies on memory keys to download onto our computers to reduce our paper consumption.

A monthly environmental festival would be held at school with competitions between homerooms to reduce their consumption and waste. Fun challenges like “Go vegetarian for the day” would be educational and fun. Students who demonstrated environmental leadership would be nominated to attend workshops where they would learn skills and knowledge about exciting things such as biomimicry. All schools in Fredericton would work together on fun projects to promote the environment.

In order to make projects and activities be sustainable long term, the whole community would be involved! A green shift in our consciousness would diminish our desire to buy and consume more and more! Positive news about the environment would be in the media all the time! Companies would not be able to falsely advertise “Green” or “Organic”.

More comprehensive regulations would be made to protect biodiversity and reduce the harming of our earth. All groups of people would be included in discussions. Buffer zones for development around areas such as wetlands would be increased and strongly enforced. A huge decrease in development and urban sprawl would be socially accepted and embraced by the public.

On a sunny Saturday morning instead of seeing a full parking lot in the mall, there would be an abundance of bikers and skiers. All around Fredericton in the woodlot and Odell Park people would be enjoying nature. Sustainable vacations would be a cultural norm with vacationers staying in New Brunswick to hike the Fundy Trail and camp in

Mactaquac. Instead of board games such as Monopoly that focus on building more and acquiring more money, we'd play Monopo-Tree where the goal would be to plant trees and protect species.

These many projects would only be the beginning! Long term change begins with action *now!* We're all given the opportunity to make change for the environment with every day choices. The question I ask myself is, is this merely a green dream or can I make this a reality? I've already began to work towards this goal with my current use of my bike as transportation, environmental advocacy and my personal reduction in my consumption. Mohandas K. Gandhi also said "Action expresses priorities." I truly believe my current environmental passion will never wilt with age; however I will let my actions be a testament to this truth.