

Defining Sustainability

Estimated time for activity ~45min (~5 min prep time)

Objective

Students will discuss and collaborate to explore the term sustainability. Students will develop their own definition of sustainability and think about ways they can become more sustainable in their own daily lives.

Essential Questions

- What is sustainability?
- What does sustainability mean to you?
- How can you practice sustainability?

Materials (5-10 minutes prep time)

- pencils and paper
- Large paper sheets, post its and markers
- Big Ideas of Sustainability
- Images of Sustainability as reference (page 3)
- Grade level definitions as reference (page 4)
- Copies of the student activity sheet & questions

Background

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Achieving sustainability as commonly defined requires understanding the interconnections among the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of our shared systems and challenges. The interconnected nature of sustainability is illustrated in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This lesson invites students into thinking about what a broad definition of sustainability can mean within their own school and community context.

GRADE LEVEL



3-12

CONNECTIONS TO THE BIG IDEAS OF SUSTAINABILITY



Place



Systems



Community

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS



SCIENCE:
PATTERNS



SOCIAL STUDIES:
PLACES &
ENVIRONMENTS



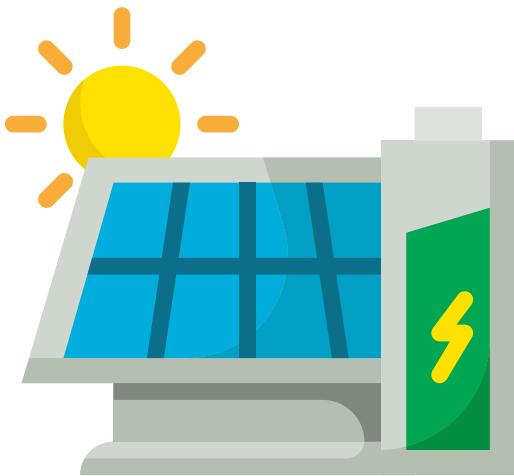
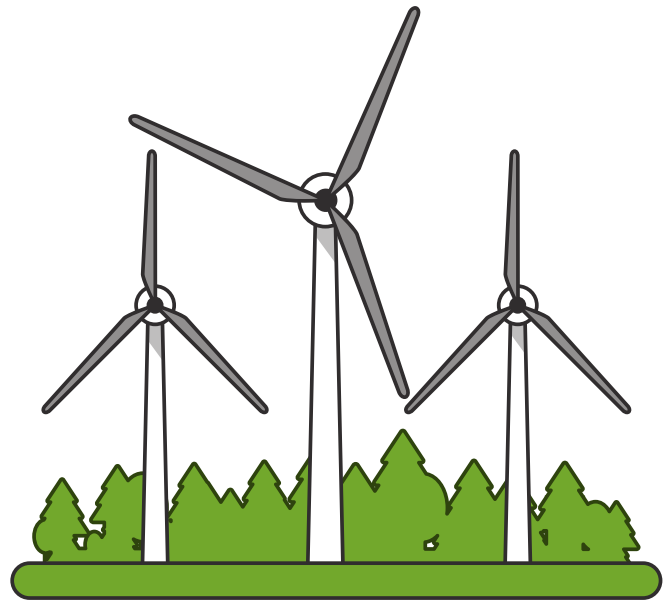
ELA:
WRITING

Activity

(30-45 Minutes)

1. Put the word sustainability on the board and draw a circle around it. Ask students what comes to mind when they hear this word. Take any and all responses. As students respond, create a word web of all the student responses by writing their words on the board. *Optional:* Show them the pictures on the next page to get them to think about ideas.
2. Hand each student a Student Activity Sheet and have them fill out the **Think** section. If students have trouble thinking of their own definition of sustainability they can refer to the word web created in step 1.
3. Once they have filled out the **Think** section, have students discuss their personal definitions with a partner or in small groups (3-5 students) and come up with a new definition of sustainability that combines both/all their personal definitions. Have them write this in the **Pair** section.
4. In the **Share** section, have the group finalize their definition and draw a picture that visualizes their definition. Then have them write their group definition and image on a large paper sheet, which can be displayed around the classroom. Then have each group share out loud their definition. *Optional:* You can also have students display their definitions on a large paper sheet and do a gallery walk. Using sticky notes, have students comment on each group's definition. Consider using sentence stems, *I like... I wonder... What if...*, to help students think of comments to write.
5. **As a wrap up**, have students answer the reflection questions. There are modified questions for elementary, middle, and high school students. Use these questions to guide a class discussion.

Images of Sustainability



Grade Level Definitions of Sustainability

Elementary school definition:

Sustainability means taking care of things now so that people in the future can also have what they need.

Middle school definition:

Sustainability is about making sure we meet our needs today, balancing environmental, economic, and social concerns, without hurting the planet or making it hard for future generations to meet their needs.

High school definition:

Sustainability is when the environmental, economic, and social needs of a society are met in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Student Activity Sheet

Defining Sustainability

1. Think: In a word, describe the term sustainability. Then write with your own personal definition of sustainability.

2. Pair: With a partner or small group, come up with a new definition of sustainability where you combine your personal definitions.

3. Share: Draw a picture that visualizes your group definition of sustainability.

Defining Sustainability

Reflection Questions (6-8th grade)

- 1. What influenced your personal definition of sustainability?**
- 2. How did your personal definition of sustainability differ from the group definition?**
- 3. What are some examples of sustainability in your daily life?**
- 4. What are some ways you can be more sustainable at home? at school? in your community?**
- 5. How can we work together to create a shared environment where all living things can thrive?**

