
KEY CHARACTERISTIC #1 FAIRNESS AND ACCURACY



Environmental education materials should be fair and accurate in describing environmental problems, issues, and conditions, and in reflecting the diversity of perspectives on them.

1.1) Factual accuracy.

Environmental education materials should reflect sound theories and well-documented facts about subjects and issues.

What to look for:

- Sources of factual information are clearly referenced.
- Data are drawn from current and identified sources of information. (Knowing the source of information can aid in judging its trustworthiness or identifying possible bias.)
- Factual information is presented in language appropriate for education rather than for propagandizing.
- Information comes from primary sources, which provide context, documentation, and explanation, rather than from reviews or newspaper articles that simply provide bits and pieces of arguments or evidence.
- A range of experts in the appropriate fields reviewed the materials or participated in their development in another way. The materials provide a list of the people involved in development and review, and their areas of expertise.

1.2) Balanced presentation of differing viewpoints and theories.

Where there are differences of opinion or competing scientific explanations, the range of perspectives should be presented in a balanced way.

Example: 1.1

Pro and Con: Consumptive and Non-Consumptive Uses of Wildlife

The background information for this activity, intended for use with secondary school learners, is presented in language appropriate for education, rather than for propagandizing.

Consumptive uses are generally considered to be those in which wildlife is killed, as in hunting, fishing, and trapping. Such uses may include as a food source; for sport; for recreation; as a source of products for personal use; as a source of products for commercial use and sale; as a means to control damage to private land and crops; and as a population management tool.

Non-consumptive uses are generally considered to be those in which any wildlife is watched, studied, or recorded without being killed, such as in hiking, birdwatching, sketching, and photography. Such uses may be for purposes of recreation, education, and research. Some non-consumptive uses may actually be vicarious, such as movie, television, and gallery viewing of wildlife.

Just as consumptive uses of wildlife have impacts on individuals and populations, so can non-consumptive uses. There are times, for example, when non-consumptive uses may actually be damaging to wildlife and its habitat, such as observation of wildlife at too close ranges during breeding seasons, and high human use of areas where endangered species may be negatively impacted.

Project WILD Activity Guide. Council for Environmental Education. Reprinted with permission from Project Wild, © 1983, 1985, 1992, 2002.

What to look for:

- Proponents of differing viewpoints reviewed the materials or helped develop them in another way. The materials list the people involved in development and review, and their organizational affiliation.
- Opinions or policies of an agency or organization are clearly identified as such.

- Scientifically and socially credible positions and explanations are covered thoroughly, while other positions are also mentioned. (Balanced presentation does not mean giving equal time and space to every opinion or perspective, but treating major positions fairly.)

- Materials communicate areas of consensus among scientists or other experts.

1.3) Openness to inquiry. Materials should encourage learners to explore different perspectives and form their own opinions.

What to look for:

- Educators are given tools to use in helping learners to form and express opinions about competing theories.
- Exercises are suggested for helping learners explore personal and societal values and conflicting points of view within the context of the issue.
- Materials promote an atmosphere of respect for different opinions and an openness to new ideas.
- There are exercises that encourage learners to understand the opinions of their peers.
- Materials suggest projects that involve learners in collecting and analyzing their own data and comparing those data to similar data from other places.
- Activities encourage learners to become discerning readers and observers of media coverage of environmental matters.

1.4) Reflection of diversity.

Different cultures, races, genders, social groups, ages, etc., are included with respect and equity.

What to look for:

- Materials contain descriptions and illustrations that depict people of various races, ethnic groups, genders, and social groups in a respectful and equitable manner.

Example: 1.3

What Do People Think?

This activity shows an openness to inquiry, suggesting ways for students of all ages to explore values and conflicting points of view.

Procedure

1. Tell the children that they are going to be responsible for creating a survey to find out other people's knowledge and attitudes about food and hunger.
2. Go around the room and ask each student to contribute possible questions for the survey.
3. Have the group choose a list of eight to fifteen questions to be used in the survey [depending on their age].
4. Type or carefully write out the survey.
5. Distribute the surveys. Have each person fill one out. Compare the results.
6. Ask the children to take two or three surveys home and find people in their neighborhoods of any age to answer the questions. Ask that they bring the surveys back to class.
7. When the surveys are returned, compile the results.
8. Discuss how people's attitudes differ or are the same, how attitudes of community members differ from attitudes of group members, how well-informed people seem to be, whether there are any attitudes that the children would like to change, and how these could be changed.
9. Journals—Give children time to put their surveys in their journals and to make entries about what other community members think about food and hunger and on what they've learned about doing a survey.

Rubin, Laurie. *Food First Curriculum*, Oakland, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1984

- Where such variety is appropriate, the content and illustrations depict rural, suburban, and urban settings.
- If the material is designed for nationwide use, the content and illustrations reflect geographic differences appropriately.
- Experts in multicultural education and members of historically under-represented groups, such as women and people of color, have been involved in the development and review process.
- Readings and additional resources that present concepts and perspectives from different cultures are offered.