

Lesson Plan: What On Earth Is Going On?

3-6: Teacher Materials

Common Ground: The Water, Earth and Air We Share By Molly Bang

Overview

This book discusses the following concepts:

- If there is a common or shared resource owned by all of us, and if I can use the common resource at little or no cost to me, and if I get to pocket all or most of the profit I make from its use, I am going to do it.
 - I benefit from my use of the commons. As long as I'm not greedy, and as long as the commons is large in comparison to what I use, there is no problem.
 - But even if I'm not greedy, my neighbors might be.
 - Even if my neighbors aren't greedy, someone or some corporation clear across town might be. And that greedy person or corporation pose a problem. The person or corporation uses more of the commons – something that belongs to all of us – but only that person or corporation pockets most of the profit. Our common resource is deplete, but only a few individuals benefit.
 - This can go on until holes begin to appear in the commons and all of our lives – and the lives of other living things – are affected.
 - This is the situation we're in today.
 - So far we don't have the understanding or the political will to address it.
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Environmental Considerations in *Common Good: The Water, Earth and Air We Share*

Bang believes that our present system is inadequate to deal with the problem of the commons in the following three ways:

- Common land that is available to everyone, unless strict laws are put in place most people will be tempted to cut down just one or two extra trees. A strict system needs to be set up for maintaining a resource, people tend to use it up – as is evident with many species of fish
- Private land can lead to lost damages not being held accountable to the owner. An example would be if a land owner decided to cut down his forest and build apartments. Erosion could cause the rich topsoil mud to wash into local streams, silting up the streams and damaging a common resource
- Private land can also lead to other concerns; if equipment is placed on lands for reasons such as reducing emissions, the land owner does not have to pay for any of the pollution he/she is causing the air we all share

Simply stated, Bang believes that our current system is set up in a way that companies and the people who benefit the most from using up our resources do not have to pay the costs of maintaining them; therefore, as long as someone can take a resource and not have to be responsible for maintaining it, someone will.

Fisherman catch too many fish, lumber companies cut too many trees, other companies and individuals use up too much oil, gas and coal; in each situation a short-term benefit and a long-term problem arise.

Main message is that one by one, we are destroying the natural resources that sustain our lives and everything we will be left with the statement that “now we don’t have any place else to go”.

Betsy Potter: Breaking Nature/Suggested Ideas/Themes

Polar Bear and Man

- Confrontation between humankind and civilization
- Man (dressed in a powerful red tie) is violently confronting the elements of nature
- Equal halves split
- Left side features symbols and elements of unmolested nature
- Right side features examples of humankind’s negative impact on nature
- Hands of the fighters are transplanted to each other
- Oil rig – crude oil’s impact on nature and the necessity to civilization being lost
- Polar ice melt and global warming
- Objects floating with no direction into the water
- Adolescent girl is floating unaware in the open sea – innocence of the future

Looking for Niagara

- Inspired by a poem
- Beauty and fragility of the Niagara River
- Split strategically down the middle
- Post-humankind’s impact is on the left – lack of waterfowl, bridge is unfinished/collapsed, impending storm approaching all symbolize nature’s fury
- Right side represent pre-industrialization

Round 7

- Confrontation between humankind and civilization
- Man’s severed hand at the base of the tree has 6 fingers symbolizing mutation
- Tree, cut back to the trunk, has been mutilated
- Potential that battle between man and nature is a draw

Yards

- Adolescent girl is now engaged with the viewer in direct eye contact; still an image of the innocence of the future
- Suburban areas have taken over the natural life, animals now just seem to float in and out of our world (the animal in the sky and cat in the trees)
- We worry more about the superficial looks of our yards and material outsides rather than the natural world and beauty that was already there

On/Off Road

- The words around the boarder are how we tend to live our lives today
- The power, speed, money etc. all take over and take the place of the natural world
- In doing so, such natural objects (animals) are subject to the carelessness of our world (road kill); encroaching in on the natural habitat

Schooner Michigan

- Real-life event occurring in 1827
- Hotel proprietors staged a gruesome tourist stunt with the Schooner Michigan at Niagara Falls
- Advertisement stated: "The Pirate Michigan with a cargo of ferocious wild animals will pass the great rapids and falls", schooner was decorated to look like a pirate ship with human-shaped mannequins tied to the dock
- 10,000 spectators watched as the Michigan was released into the current with a buffalo, two bears, two raccoons, a dog, two fox, fifteen geese and an eagle
- As it reached the rapids, the hull was torn open and began filling with water; the two bears jumped free and swam to safety
- Re-surfaced at the base of the falls only the goose had survived
- Aspect of humankind as a form of entertainment and an endless supply of animals for our amusement

Digger

- Man has become so careless through industrialization
- Digging and building with total disregard for nature and natural objects in our world
- Carelessness of just toss the animals and trees etc. to the side; again encroaching in on the natural habitat

Last Man

- Greed and money have taken over our preservation of nature and the natural world
 - Mans arm in the air shows entitlement and power in the picture
 - Humans are sitting on top of money in an animal-made (bear) vehicle of power; disrupted the natural world (skunk has a can for a head, one of the birds is enclosed in a glass covering)
 - Below the surface is the natural world and habitat we have encroached on and taken over
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