From Issue to Opportunity

OVERVIEW

Help students understand and define global issues and their interconnections. Students develop criteria for determining what makes an issue global in scope, brainstorm and list global issues, group and prioritize the issues into categories to highlight interconnections, and explore solutions.

INQUIRY/CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

- What defines a global issue?
- How are global issues connected to each other and to our own lives?
- What is the benefit of understanding the connections between global issues?

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Develop and discuss criteria for defining a global issue
- Identify, group, and prioritize global issues
- Explore and explain the interconnections between global issues as well as their solutions

TIME REQUIRED: 1 hour

KEY ISSUES/CONCEPTS

- **Global issues**
- **Interconnectedness**
- **Leverage**
- **Problems as opportunities**

SUBJECT AREAS

- **Social Studies** (Geography, Economics, Civics/Government, Contemporary World Problems)
- **Science** (Life, Environmental)

NATIONAL STANDARDS CONSISTENCY

- **NCSS: 3, 5, 7, 9**
- **NSES: C, F**

GRADE LEVEL: 9–12

FTF Related Reading

- Intermediate: Chapter 1 from *Global Issues and Sustainable Solutions*
- Advanced: Unit 1, Chapter 1 from *It's All Connected*

Materials/Preparation

- Overhead: *Defining a Global Issue*
- Butcher paper, 5–10 sheets
- Marking pens, 1 per student
- Sticker dots, 2 per student

Activity

Introduction

1. Ask students, "What makes an issue global versus local?" Brainstorm, list, and discuss the defining criteria of a global issue. These may include the following: global issues have significant impacts, they are trans-boundary, they are persistent (occurring repeatedly over time), and they are interconnected. Use the overhead *Defining a Global Issue* to help lead this part of the discussion.

Steps

1. Have the class brainstorm and list on the board or overhead as many global issues they can think of, assessing each issue against the agreed-upon criteria for defining a global issue.
2. Look at the entire list and have the class develop categories into which similar issues can be grouped. For example, rain forest destruction, loss

From Issue to Opportunity

of natural habitat, global warming, and species extinction could all be categorized under "The Environment". Other possible categories include: Health, Human Rights, Energy, Food and Water Security, Peace and Conflict, Economics, Population, Governance, and Culture/Worldview. After deciding on 5 or more categories, write each category on the top of separate pieces of butcher paper and post them around the room.

3. Have the students go to each of the posted sheets and write the global issues from the brainstorm list under a relevant heading. There will likely be issues that fall under more than 1 category.
4. Give each student 2 sticker dots. Have him/her walk around the room, read all the posted sheets, and then place a sticker on what he/she believes are the 2 most-important categories.
5. Conclude with the following reflection questions.

Assessment
Reflection Questions

For Intermediate and Advanced Students

- Which category had the most votes (stickers)? Is there a clear majority? (If there is a clear majority, consider focusing a unit of study on the most popular global issue(s)).
- Which category ended up with the most issues?
- Which specific issue fell under the most categories?
- Why is it that some issues seem to have many connections? How might this information be useful and what might this tell us about the issue(s)?

For Advanced Students

- Explain the idea of "leverage". The global issues that seem to be most connected to other issues are probably ones that have the highest leverage. Working on 1 or 2 issues that have several connections, therefore, can help alleviate many other problems. Brainstorm possible solutions to the high-leverage global issues.
- Discuss the process of brainstorming, grouping, and prioritizing used in this activity. Discuss the potential this process has for solving other problems.

From Issue to Opportunity

Writing Connection

- Have students participate in a Model United Nations–style of assembly in which they act as country delegates, writing and presenting resolutions that address specific global issues.
- Have each student choose 1 issue from the class list (or a new one) and use either a diagram or a paragraph to demonstrate how it meets the criteria of a global issue (as defined in the activity). This assignment emphasizes students' ability to assess and apply criteria and illustrate interconnectedness. Students may want to have time to do some Internet research on their chosen issue in order to do a more thorough job. Give students the following instructions: Choose 1 of the global issues we have listed today. Then, draw a diagram or write 1-2 paragraphs that illustrate how this issue meets at least 3 of the criteria we established for a "global issue". You must include "interconnectedness" and "significant impacts" as 2 of the criteria. For each set of criteria, give 3 examples of how your issue qualifies as a global issue. One way to approach this might be to imagine that you are a legislator or a philanthropist setting out to work on this issue. Ask yourself which other interconnected issues you will need to take into account. Which groups might you want to collaborate with? In order to convince people to support your issue, you will need to be able to explain the impacts of the issue and why it is important.

Action Projects

- Interview members of the community to find out how global issues are affecting their local community. Findings can be shared with the local media.
- Create a service learning project guide for young people in your community. Research organizations that are addressing community needs and contact them to find out what service opportunities they provide for youth. Compile the information in a format that is accessible for young people and share it through a website, school districts in your area, or in hard copy.
- Visit **www.facingthefuture.org** and click on **Take Action**, and then **Fast Facts Quick Actions** for more information and action opportunities on a variety of global issues.

Additional Resources

Films

- *Spaceship Earth: Our Global Environment,* Kirk Bergstrom and Kit Thomas, 1999. Hosted by young people, this program travels around the world to explore 3 primary environmental issues: deforestation, global warming, and ozone depletion.

Websites

- **www.globalexchange.org** - Global Exchange is an international human rights organization dedicated to promoting social, economic, and environmental justice around the world.

- **www.conservationeconomy.net** - This website asks the question, "What does a sustainable society look like?" and provides frameworks for an ecologically restorative, socially just, and prosperous society and restructure systems in ways that move us toward a sustainable society.

Lesson 5 - From Issue to Opportunity - Overhead:
Defining a Global Issue

DEFINING A GLOBAL ISSUE

What makes an issue "global"?

Global Issues Are:

- Significant
- Trans-national or trans-boundary
- Persistent or long-acting
- Interconnected