

What Does Green Mean?

Description

How does your organization define its “green” work? Moreover, how do you make this “green” work meaningful to the lives of the people in your community? By identifying what “green” looks like in your area, you can have a better sense of how your initiatives can best serve the people, places, and natural communities near you. You can also gain a clearer understanding of how to frame and target your environmental efforts. Using the following instructions as your guide, you can uncover the stories, challenges, opportunities, and relationships that bridge the life of your community with your own “green” work. The more you honor this bridge – between community dynamics and environmental efforts – the more connected community members will feel to your initiatives.

This activity shows you how to build this bridge with dynamic conversations about what “green” means to people in your community. The activity consists of sixteen images that represent “green” places, people, activities, and issues. The accompanying worksheet prompts participants to reflect on the photos and to think broadly about the meaning of “green” as it relates not only to nature but to sustaining people and strengthening social relationships as well. You can use either The Field Museum’s *What Does Green Mean?* photos of scenes from the Chicago region, or photos depicting your community.

*Note that The Field Museum photo file contains both images and captions. The captions, however, are not intended to be displayed with the photos, which are meant to be evocative; the captions are for just for the facilitator’s use, to understand the images better and share if someone asks you what one of the photos is.

LINKS: Activity for Discussion

1. Before the participants arrive, hang photos on the meeting room walls. Display them like an exhibit. Spread them out enough so that everyone will be able to view the exhibit at the same time.
2. Allow participants to spend 10-20 minutes looking at the various photos and filling out their accompanying What Does Green Mean? Worksheet.
3. Confirm with the group that everyone had the opportunity to view the photo exhibit.
4. Then explain that you are going to engage the group in an interactive, fun exercise—LINKS—in which everyone will have a chance to introduce themselves and share their thoughts right away on what “green” means to them—by talking about the photos they selected.
5. Now explain the exercise, which revolves around a ball of string:
The person speaking will hold on to a piece of string and then throw the ball to another person. In the end, we will see how we're all connected. There is always lots of chuckling at this point and comments about people's lack of throwing ability—and inevitably during the throwing people will drop the ball of string. This is part of what makes this activity a great icebreaker.
6. Tell the group that the first person to talk will hold the ball of string and introduce himself or herself. Then briefly, this person will share with the group which photo he or she chose and why. (If you think it's necessary, you can be more specific and ask each person to explain specifically what event or experience the photo made him or her think of and what that represents about community and environment. The advantage to being more generic is that you don't want people to list their answers because the answers may get very long.) As people present their ideas, capture them with notes on one of the big Post-it pads.
7. Once the first person finishes, ask the group who has something in common with what the first person had to say. Then instruct the first person to hold on to the beginning of the string and throw the ball to the next person who is going to speak. Continue this exercise until everyone has had an opportunity to share their photo choice.

8. By the end of the exercise, each participant will be holding a section of the string. Instruct everyone to pull on their part of the string and point out that the string web shows only the tip of the iceberg about how we're all connected. Then reiterate the point that this activity is about understanding our connections with each other and the environment.
9. Finally, peruse your notes to identify any key understandings about green that may have emerged. Point these out and write them on a new Post-it. For example, if the majority of the participants chose 1 or 2 photos, this will be worth commenting on. Or if three or more participants mentioned a particular part of the community—say, a specific park or parks in general—point that out. You may also make note of general ideas that emerged, such as ones that demonstrate what people care about most deeply regarding “community” or “environment.” Offer the opportunity for participants to add their own observations also.

This tool is available online for download at:

<http://fieldmuseum.org/explore/department/ecco/downloads>

If you have any questions, concerns, or requests for hard copies of the tools, please contact Jennifer Hirsch at jhirsch@fieldmuseum.org.



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Beaubien Woods:

Once seen as unfit for recreational activities, Beaubien Woods has recovered with help from concerned residents, the Forest Preserve District, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This picture shows anglers taking advantage of the refurbished recreation facilities at Beaubien Woods.



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Bee Keepers:

Chicago Honey Co-op, an urban sustainable agriculture bee farm in the North Lawndale neighborhood, provides job-training opportunities to the underemployed.



Courtesy of Lucy Gomez-Feliciano

Bicyclists:

Residents took over the streets during the 2008 Chicago Sunday Parkways event when boulevards were closed to motorized traffic, enabling thousands to exercise, mingle, and explore their neighborhoods.



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Boy in Sprinkler:

A new park provides an outdoor space for diverse residents to strengthen community ties in Chicago's North Kenwood/Oakland neighborhood.

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Fall Dunes:

Autumn grasses and rushes are beautiful at Montrose Beach. Restoration at the beach is bringing wildlife back into the city.

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Girl on Sand Dune:

A youth enjoys the outdoors at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

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Man Sitting on Storefront Steps:

Loitering is frowned upon along this commercial strip of Chicago's North Kenwood/Oakland community. Signs prohibiting loitering hang in storefronts. A banner for "The Grove" hangs from the lamp post by the street. This and other banners are part of a marketing strategy to attract new customers and business to the neighborhood.



Lg \$3.25
Med \$2.25
SM \$1.25

Lg \$3.00
Med \$1.75
SM 99¢

Field Museum, ECCo

Man with Ice Cream:

This supermarket owner in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood wanted to get away from using styrofoam cups and plastic spoons. So he partnered with a woman in the neighborhood to make this edible bowl out of dough. It can hold up to three scoops of ice cream and, unlike waffle cones, doesn't get soggy.



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Monarch and Compass Plant:

Monarch butterflies migrate from Mexico to Chicago and beyond. The Compass Plant is a perennial found chiefly in open grasslands.



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Recycled Art:

A partnership between Chicago-based organizations Centro Comunitario Juan Diego and the Southeast Environmental Task Force resulted in a program on creative recycling. As part of the program, families created this tapestry, which combines recycled objects from contemporary life with skeletons, a common symbol used during “Day of the Dead” celebrations, which are based on Mexican cultural beliefs that see death and life as an integrated whole. The dead or ancestors are present with the living; it even could be said that these beliefs portray life itself as a “recycling” process.



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Sailor at Harbor:

Sailors enjoy the pier at Waukegan Harbor.

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Scarlet Tanager:

Striking black wings upon the otherwise red bird make this Scarlet-Tanager a stunning site in Chicago region woodlands in the spring.



© The Field Museum, ECCo

Solar Water Heater:

To save money on his heating bill, an electrician/carpenter built this solar water heater for his family's home in Chicago's Jefferson Park, duplicating what he did at his recreational home in the Polish countryside. This renewable energy system will lower his family's gas usage and save money on their heating bill. He also replaced their old home heater with one that is certified energy efficient.



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South Chicago Mural:

Over 14 murals transform schools, parks, social service agencies, and viaducts into vibrant expressions of community strength in the South Chicago neighborhood. This mural depicts aspects of the community's rich cultural diversity.



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Woodland Area:

Woodland habitat once dominated much of the Chicago region.

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