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ABSTRACT

This activity is one of a series of 17 teacher-developed instructional activities for geography at the secondary-grade level described in SO 009 140. The activity investigates the role of story telling as illustrative of human values and as an appropriate medium for environmental education. The author identifies a need for individuals to know who they are in relation to their environment, and he recommends reflective inquiry on the many answers discovered by societies and individuals. Thus, myth, biography, autobiography, and religious-philosophical literature are seen to be useful in communicating a world view and sets of values and in developing personal awareness and empathy in the reader. Eighteen "self-revealing and clarifying activities" are suggested for students to put themselves in touch with their environment. Among them are fantasies about the life of inanimate objects and memories of past events in one's own life. A final exercise involves evaluating eight life-styles and rank-ordering them by preference. (Author/DB)

National Council for Geographic Education

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES SERIES IA/S-14

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AS TELLING OUR STORIES

by

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The author addresses himself to the idea that man reveals his values through the stories he tells. Professor Allen suggests using myths, legends, sacred literature, fiction, and biography as media for environmental education.

> Philosophy precedes ecology. What is needed today are new realizations about man's place in the universe, a new sense of life, a new pride in the importance of being human, a new anticipation of the potentialities of mind, a new joyousness in the possibilities for human unity, and a new determination to keep this planet from becoming uninhabitable.[1]

Environmental educators in the U. S. have placed an emphasis upon concrete phenomena in nature, using factual information about natural objects and processes in concert with a few concepts and systems drawn from science. Students look at "nature" and, from their observations and the instructor's comments, they learn verifiable propositions. In the jargon of professional educators this operation is known variously as "education for problem solving," "citizenship education," and "environmental education." But one wonders how effective this operation is, when taken alone, to accomplish the mighty goals assigned to it. The emphasis is upon objectively viewing what is Out-There, separate from the observer. Participation is restricted to looking, handling, manipulating, experimenting, and thinking. There is usually no consideration of personal relationships and responses. There is no emphasis upon what is going on In-Here as I experience the process of environmental education: How do I feel? How do I see myself in relation to the tree or brown pelican? The knowing that counts is the "basic facts," "concepts," and "verifiable propositions" which I have accumulated and can use on command.

But there just may be other ways of knowing that will have complimentary and powerful implications for the way we live and relate to other life. Beyond "information" (basic facts) and "knowledge" (concepts and verifiable propositions), there is the sort of personal knowledge Lao-tzu referred to in his dictum "those who know do not speak." While it is not fashionable now, educators used to set their goals beyond information and empirical knowledge to something they fondly called "wisdom." They did not begin with "What is this?" "What do you know?" or "How shall we know?" Rather, they began with

a broad existential question: "Who are we and how shall we live?" As Theodore Rozak reminds us:

> To ask this question is to insist that the primary purpose of human existence is not to devise ways of piling up ever greater heaps of knowledge, but to discover ways to live from day to day that integrate the whole of our nature and joy. And to achieve those ends, a man need perhaps "know" very little in the conventional, intellectual sense of the word. But what he does know and may only be able to express by eloquent silence, by the grace of his most commonplace daily gestures, will approach more closely to whatever reality is than the most dogged and disciplined intellectual endeavor. For if that elusive concept "reality" has any meaning, it must be that toward which the entire human being reaches out for satisfaction, and not simply some fact-and-theory-mongering fraction of the personality.[2]

Whether or not one can accept all of Roszak's assessment, the point is that knowing and being encompass more than information and empirical knowledge, and that philosophy, as Norman Cousins suggested, should precede ecology in environmental education. More basic quesitons might be:

1. Not: What should I do? or How shall I know? or How should I tinker with our environment?
   But: Who am I and how shall I live? Who are we and how shall we live?

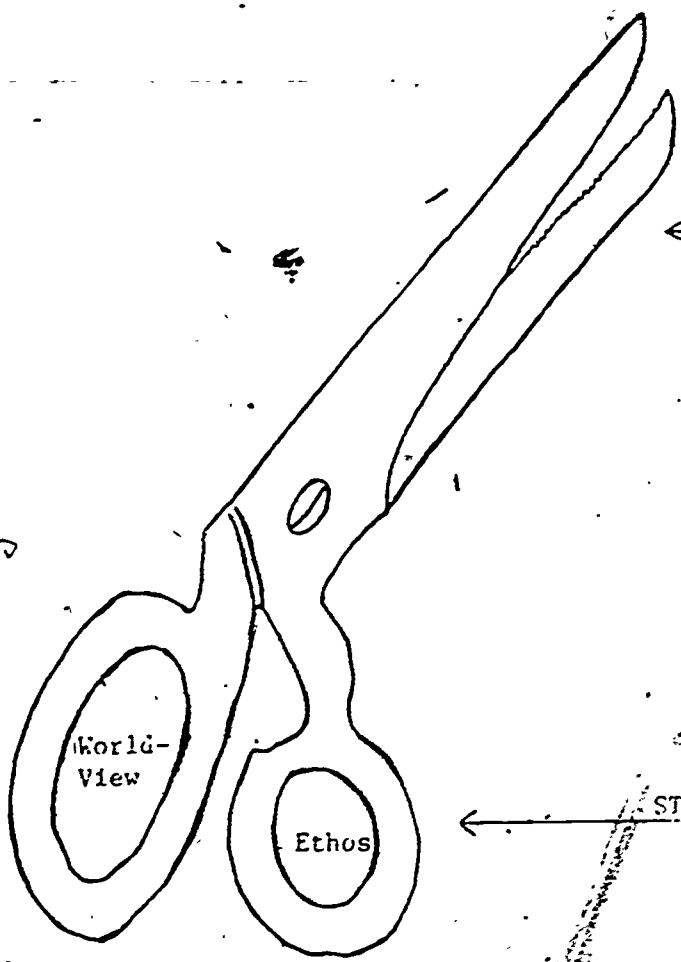
2. Not: What is going on? or What do we need to know? or How can we solve that?
   But: What am I trying to do in life? What are we trying to do? What kind of a society and environment do we want to live in?

These questions imply an environmental education which includes reflective inquiry on the many answers which cultures, societies, and individuals have discovered and lived. They imply that environmental educators should assist students in clarifying their own responses to the questions and supporting their inquiry into others' answers.

To support this thrust in environmental education, there are two broad concepts which are useful and appropriate for all students whether they be children or adults. The question "Who am I and how shall I live?" contains the concepts:

"Who am I? Who are we?" -- the concept STORY (Worldview and Ethos)
"How shall I/we live?" -- the concept WAY (Lifestyle)

The relationship between the concepts may be depicted simply by the following diagram:



WAY ← Cutting Edge -- Decision-making and acting

STORY ← The Handles we have on self and life -- Ethos and World-View

STORY

Human beings have a need to hear and to tell stories, and to have a story to live by. There are personal stories which tell "What happened to me." and there are collective stories of institutions, societies, and groups, including families and clans, which tell what happened to us.

Go back in time to the cave painting in Spain by Neolithic Man, the legends of the Aborigine and other "primitive" groups. Go back to the bloody Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh and Homer's accounts of the gods. The tales of Cheyenne shamen, Eskimo holy men, Bantu priests, early Japanese leaders, and others have been told and retold to each generation in turn. The Bible and other sacred literature of religious traditions are essentially stories. The rich folk literature of the world's peoples is essentially stories, which capture headlines and armies when manipulated by nationalists. Today, parents continue to recount stories to their children, and to their neighbors and colleagues at cocktail parties. Film, television, and other media stand in testiment to the power of, and need for, telling and hearing stories. As Harvey Cox observed:

> ...Human beings are storytellers, and without stories we would not be human. Through our stories we assemble our pasts, place ourselves in a present and cast a hope for the future. Without stories we would be bereft of memory or anticipation. We know we are something more than mere hairless bipeds, because of our parables, jokes, sagas, fairy tales, myths, fables, epics and yarns. Not only have we created innumerable stories, we have also found endless ways to recount them. We dance them, draw them, mime them with masks and carve them on rocks. We sing them around tables stacked with the cold remains of a dinner. We whisper them in the ears of sleepy children in darkened bedrooms. We stammer them out to confessors and therapists. We inscribe them in letters and diaries. We act them out in the clothes we wear, the places we go, the friends we cherish. As soon as our young can comprehend our words we begin to tell them stories, and the hope we harbor for our elders is that we will be able to hear their full story before they go...[3]

Our stories have two dimensions. First, they contain our worldview, our sense of what is real and true. Second, they contain our set of commitments, our ethos, our values and highest priorities about the way life should be lived and its moral tone. Our stories not only affect our way and our disposition toward other human beings, but our beliefs about, and actions toward, all living creatures. Thus, our stories are critical elements in our environmental education.

Bronislaw Malinowski, and anthropologist, accentuated the function of "myth" in a community and in the lives of its members. While he writes of "myth" and "primitive" peoples, we can readily substitute the word "story" for "myth."

> Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. This myth is to the savage what, to a fully believing Christian, is the Biblical story of Creation, of the Fall, of the Redemption by Christ's Sacrifice on the

> Cross. As our sacred story lives in our ritual, in our morality, as it governs our faith and controls our conduct, even so does his myth for the savage.[4]

The term "savage" may seem extreme in our time and the term "sacred" may not apply to many stories in urban-individual societies of the twentieth century. But the point remains that story is a living reality. Each person, institution, and group lives out a unique story and by the living we tell a story to ourselves and others. The story defines our unity as a person or group. It provides a self-concept with our memories and myths, hopes and images, rites and customs. Each lends meaning to life and guides our way of living. Our story gives us our concept of our place in life, our significance and identity. Students watching Encyclopedia Britiannica's old animated film, The Loon's Necklace (1945), still one of their most popular films, see the myth -- a story with religious truth -- as it operated in the lives of Native Canadians in British Columbia. Audiences watching Gregory Peck and Jane Wyman in the film, The Yearling, see characters acting out the stories which guide their relations with each other and with their environment. Once the audience discerns each character's story they can anticipate his or her way. Another film powerful in environmental education, is The Grapes of Wrath with Henry Fonda. It is the story of the Okies and Arkies migrating out of their "Dust Bowl" to California during the Depression years. But it is also the personal growth which occurs through experience. The story aspect of life may be seen in numerous films, from Easy Rider to Five Easy Pieces, from Sounder to Conrack. Each shows that a human life is a declaration of identity, significance, role, and place, that human action is the living out of a story in the cosmos.

In our daily intercourse with others we have a tendency toward self-hypnosis, in that we are unaware that we live out a story and we tend to treat others' stories as "myth", "supersitition," "fairy tales," and "falsehoods," each a pejoritive term. We do this at the same time we refer to our stories, unaware that they are "stories," as "philosophy," "science," "religion," "law," "medicine," "technology," and even "education."

The objectives for story telling in environmental education first involve creating personal awareness of the story dimension of life: how I live out a personal, unique story in my way of life; how I am taught a story by my parents, teachers, and social interactions within my group; how I help to teach others their stories by my interaction with them. This demands that I make my story conscious to myself and, for environmental education, to be conscious of the impact of my story on the way I act toward, and interact with, other life in my biotic community.

The second major objective for story telling in environmental education involves developing empathy for others' stories and ways by becoming conscious of them and by reflecting upon their implications for environmental quality. The examination of the stories in film, literature, history, and contemporary life over this opportunity. In addition, students have the opportunity to grow, to alter their stories and ways, based upon this reflective inquiry of others' ways of living and making meaning of life. Education which includes story telling is true to the meaning of "education"

as revealed in its Latin root, meaning "to bring forth", to bring forth alternative stories and ways of living for consideration.

The expression of the two concepts, story and way, may be discerned in the words of a California Native American woman who commented upon the way of the white man in contrast to her way:

> The white people never cared for land or deer or bear. When we Indians kill meat, we eat it all up. When we dig roots, we make little holes... We shake down acorns and pinenuts. We don't chop down the trees. We only use dead wood. But the white people plow up the ground, pull up the trees, kill everything. The tree says, "Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me." But they chop it down and cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. . .The Indians never hurt anything, but the white people destroy all. They blast rocks and scatter them on the ground. The rock says "Don't! You are hurting me," But the white people pay no attention. When the Indians use rocks, they take little round ones for their cooking. . .How can the spirit of the earth like the white man? . . .Everywhere the white man has touched it, it is sore.[3]

SHARING STORIES

The suggestion here is not that story telling offers absolute truth or ultimate values which others must or should accept. A Native American's story is not studied with the tacit assumption that we should all go back to nature or at least emulate the Indian's worldview. Reading the Taoist's conception of nature or the Jainist's disposition toward life is no hint that we ought to switch religious traditions before it is too late. Rather, the telling of stories first serves an educational purpose in helping us develop empathy -- moral sensitivity to others' needs, feelings, life experiences, commitments and perspectives, and to the web of social and natural reciprocity. Second, the telling of stories and reflection on our way serves to lend us perspective of our self and our society. By making us aware of our own story and our own way of living set against other stories and ways, we can assess ourselves and build the basis for renewing our commitments and changing our ways. This internal dialogue may be spawned by telling and sharing stories and, given the range of materials available, it is an educational technique suitable for almost every age.

There are three kinds of stories which are useful to the environmental educator. First, others' stories in the form of biographies are available. The biographies may be personal, revealing the story both private and public of a Thoreau, Schweitzer, Emerson, Muir , or Carson. It would tell of the life experiences, values, emotions, fears and guilts of individuals in their encounter with environment and life. But these stories may also be stories of institutions: the church, National Wildlife Federation, Florida Audubon Society, Boy Scouts, Friends of the Everglades. It may be the story of a society or a culture, realistically or mythologically presented. In this way, history is a story to be told, listened to, and reflected upon for its meaning to self and its messages for humankind in nature. In this same way, literature is important as it offers the fictional stories which provide the same opportunity for personal growth in another curriculum area.

Second, environmental educators may draw upon stories in religious-philosophical systems. The sacred literature of religions, folk tales, and myths of creation offer diverse meanings, values, and guides to ways of life which provide the basis for empathy and selfawareness. Not to be overlooked in this connection are the "sacred" stories, arguments, and position statements of more secular traditions -- capitalists, Marxists, hedonists, Existentialists, Pepsi-cola jingles, Cocoa-cola songs, General Electric advertisements, and so forth. Each conveys its story and suggests a way, with environmental implications.

A third type of story is the most powerful and useful in environmental education. It is the autobiography, our own stories which reveal our public and private selves. Our experiences from our past, our thoughts and feelings in the present, and our hopes and anxieties for the future are buried in our autobiographies. Environmental education can help to bring these to consciousness and set them against our ways of life to help us all deal with inconsistencies, the environmental impact, and our own perception of needed changes.

Autobiographies are a major means to our awareness of our implicit answers to the question: Who am I and How shall I live? There are various techniques for autobiographical story telling and the following are but a sample.

1. Response to Natural Phenomena or to an Eco-problem. Seeing an eagle soar or watching the construction of an interstate highway across a salt marsh, students are asked to pose the following questions:

   - How do I see what is going on here? What governs my perception? What goes on in-here, inside my head and heart, as I watch? What events and persons have helped to shape my response, my feelings, my beliefs, and my values?

   - What are my needs here? The needs of others?

   - What do I stand for? As I watch this event, what should I feel and value? What should I do? Stand silently in awe and wonder? In disgust? Protest? Organize? What is appropriate and responsible?

   - What do my responses tell me about myself -- my answer to the greater, existential question, "Who am I and How should I live?" Why do my responses say about my real life-goals, what I am trying to do in life, what I live for?

2. Response to Contrasting Environments. Fourth graders are given a set of twelve pairs of slides. Each pair shows contrasting environments based upon several dimensions: greater or lesser relief, richer or poorer vegetation, urban-rural, warmer or cooler temperatures, etc. The students are asked to indicate their preference and explain why they have such a preference. Then, half of the class studies the story and way of Navaho Indians while the other half examines the story and way of Eskimos. The slides are repeated with the students making preferences and justifying them with reference to the group they just studied. Following this activity the teacher conducts a discussion of similarities and differences, and asking the students to account for the different preferences in environment by the three groups: Southeast

Indians, Eskimos, and fourth graders in Florida.

3. Self Revealing and Clarifying Activities

a. List ten words or phrases which best describe you ("I am ____."). Rank them in order of their importance to you. Check those with positive eco-impacts (+) and those with negative eco-impacts (-). Make several summary statements about yourself and your eco-impact.

b. List all of your behaviors which have an adverse eco-impact (or potential negative eco-impact), especially those which are done privately and are not open to public view. Fantasize: Pretend you are sharing your story of adverse eco-impact with those affected -- the birds, plants, and wildlife. How do they respond? Now, imagine your place without these adverse (public and private) eco-impacts.

c. List ten behaviors having adverse eco-impacts in which you do not engage. Rank from 1 to 10 based upon the strength of your denial if you were accused of doing them. What does this reveal about your concerns, values, public image, repressed desires, guilts and fears?

d. List five eco-villains in your community. Draw pictures or describe each in words. How is this villain like the real you? The ideal you? What do you admire in these villains? Fear? Now do the same thing with five eco-heros, if you have five in your community. What advice would they give you if they were seated beside you now?

e. Write an imaginary will, leaving your property, aspirations, fears, guilt, values and concerns to others. What have you got to leave? Who might want or need what you have?

f. The Greeks personified what concerned them most by creating a phethora of gods and goddesses: Pan, Dionysius, Apollo, Zeus, Aphrodite, etc. What concerns you most? Give these concerns faces and personalities through drawings, poetry, songs, and other art forms.

g. Where do you want to be in ten years? Who do you want to be? What environment do you want? Why? Do this for a tree, or a bird, or some other living creature in your community. Or do it for an animal in a city zoo or a woods on the edge of a growing town.

h. Try some utopian dreams. Imagine a perfect day in the life of an eagle, a palm tree, a blue whale, a polar bear, a slat marsh, or something you prefer. Share your dream with others.

i. List the great accomplishments, relationships, moments, successes, pleasures in your life. In a parallel column list your regrets, failures, and things yet undone. What do these lists reveal to you?

j. Fantasy encounters. Select an object or event and build an eco-fantasy around it. "Walking in a piney woods on a sunny day..." "Swimming just over a coral reef..." "A windmill on the edge of a farm..." "A seagull soaring over a bright sandy beach..."

k. Events of childhood have an impact on our environmental attitudes today. Reconstruct some good or bad events from your childhood which involved water, air, garbage, cities, highways, wildlife, etc. What is the continuing legacy of the even in your life?

l. Many times in our lives we wear the emblems and accept the codes of various organizations. List the groups which you have joined or are currently a member. What is the emblem? What is the eco-impact of their code? Scouts, YMCA, YMHA, Boys Club, Campfire Girls, church, synagogue, band, civil air patrol, Masons, Knights of Columbus. army, navy, coast guard, Lions, Chamber of Commerce, etc.

m. Recreate some environments which you have known, loved, or despised. Try an imaginary walk through your old hometown, your grandfather's farm, summer camp, park, first trip to the beach or mountains. What do you recall which shaped your attitudes? What stands out? Why? What gives pleasure in the remembering? Why? What gives pain? Why?

n. Time is an important feature of our stories. Draw a timeline of:
- your time: birth, death, where you are now, big events past and coming
- the Earth's time: birth, death, now, big events past and coming
- a tree's time, a pond's time, etc.

o. Memory and history involve more than objective facts. Try to recall a good or bad experience with a tree, a hill, a wave, an animal. Try to remember an eco-story from a parent, a film, a TV show, a folk tale. How good is your memory? Have these events shaped your attitudes or ideals in any way?

p. Let's chat about good and evil, champions and enemies. Tell your self and your friends about some big eco-enemies you have fought, or some ideals, causes, and institutions you have championed.

q. Think about some emotions: frustration, anger, hostility, joy, ecstasy, love, fear, guilt, and hate. What persons, eco-events and institutions have aroused these in you? What does this tell you about yourself, your ideals and desires?

r. List ten scenes from your past which were pivotal in shaping who you think you are today. Describe each in detail: Who was involved? Which emotions were evoked? How were you affected? Try this for personal and family crises. For rituals, celebrations, and ceremonies. List some pivotal events you hope for or expect which will have an environmental impact. What does all of this say to you about your environmental concerns?

4. Selecting a Way Among Many.[6]

Read the alternative ways to live as they are described below. As you read them, make some notes about your personal reactions. After finishing the set, rank order the eight ways to live in the order that you prefer -- No. 1 for the most desirable to No. 8 for the least desirable. If you can think of a better lifestyle than any one described below, please write it up on a separate sheet of paper, label it "No. 1." and rank order the others from No. 2 to No. 9.

This finished, sit down with your friends and discuss the differences in your rankings of the lifestyle descriptions. If you wrote up your own description, share it with others. Your discussion should be open and honest. It should stress differences among your friends, but also the reasons persons offer to explain those differences. As the discussion proceeds, reflect upon the significance of the differences for the quality of our lives together as human beings.

LIFESTYLE NO. 1

Life is something to be enjoyed fully through the senses -- a way often referred to in male terminology as enjoying "wine, women, and song," or "eat, drink and be merry." The pursuit of pleasure is man's commitment and the goal which should motivate all persons. One should let one's self go, to seek new sense experiences, to be open, and to approach living with a feeling of joy and festival. Having a good time, not doing "good," is what life is about. Enjoyment is the keystone for life and for living.

LIFESTYLE NO. 2

The contemplative life is the good life. Man must seek his true meaning by withdrawing from the world and its workings to think and to discover self-knowledge in a retreat removed from life's turmoil and tensions. This may be accomplished alone, in the mountains, on an island, or other places where a person may be isolated; or it may be accomplished in a community of persons seeking the contemplative life: a farming community, a rural commune, a monastery, etc. The essential point of this lifestyle is the rejection of the work-a-day world for inner discovery and harmony which makes one fully human.

LIFESTYLE NO. 3

A person should not withdraw from the world, keep aloof, or be self-centered. Life must involve full participation in social groups, stressing cooperation and social action to improve the group and the society. Be it in the suburbs or ghetto, rural or urban areas, persons have the obligation to love and serve their fellows and to promote justice. Energetic group action to relieve human suffering -- poverty, poor health, aging, war, alienation, etc. -- is the goal of life.

LIFESTYLE NO. 4

A person should fit peacefully into the natural flow of life. Taking what comes, we should not be demanding, seeking to change others or to change nature. We should concentrate upon ourselves -- changing only to fit into the quiet flow of the universe. Man's goodness is his devotion to the refinement of himself, not dominating anything or anyone. This refinement involves fitting into life's processes in a natural way -- on the edge of the sea, on a mountain top, in the ghetto -- wherever one chooses to live. A body at ease, a mind relaxed and grateful to the world for life, a few comforts, and a few friends -- these are the joys which come when you are youself: open, honest, receptive. They are destroyed by frantic action, deep thought, or material pursuits. Relax, good comes of its own accord!

LIFESTYLE NO. 5

The active life is a Good Life...and action is physical! Cutting a farm out from the wilderness, building ahouse full of furniture, constructing a bridge to span the river, bringing food to harvest, playing a great set of tennis, climbing a mountain, scoring three touchdowns, winning the big game -- all are fulfilling. Life finds its zest and its meaning in overcoming obstacles, in conquering, in dominating by physical action.

LIFESTYLE NO. 6

We should accept truths from many paths of life (religious traditions and philosophical systems) in molding our lifestyle. No one path should have our exclusive allegiance. Life should contain enjoyment, action, and contemplation in about equal amounts. We should not let one path of life, received from our parents, our society, or our history, dominate us. We have got to work out our own lifestyle and our own commitments, defining the Good Life and its meaning. Life is a search through many different philosophies and religions -- but in essence is a balance of action, thought, and enjoyment.

LIFESTYLE NO. 7

Self-control should be the keystone of one's lifestyle. Not the easy self-control that comes by retreating to the mountains, but the self-aware control which comes from knowing about the world and the limits of human power. Never letting high ideals drive one to great optimism or plunge one to the depths of despair, our expectations should be directed by our reason. The good man doesn't expect social utopia, doesn't expect all sweetness and light to burst forth by human action, and doesn't expect happiness from physical comforts and satisfied bodily desires. Instead, the good man must firmly live ideals, guided by reason and reasonable expectations. In this way a person may maintain a sense of dignity and humanness in a world of great problems and simplistic solutions.

LIFESTYLE NO. 8

Life too often becomes too comfortable and secure. To be fully alive, we must seek out challenges -- problems to solve with our own minds and inventiveness. Human progress depends on creative

solutions to problems and finding new ways to fulfill needs. The salesman finds new ways to set higher records. The business person finds ways to expand the firm. The scientist must discover new methods and techniques. The manufacturer seeks better products at higher profits. Life doesn't require dreamers, historians, poets, and opera singers; it demands humans who can confront and solve today's problems with their own intellect and insight.

> The one thing needed to recover and preserve the American environment is exactly the one thing money, programs, and Presidents cannot instantly effect among the people: a reverance for the earth. The reverence, in its simplist form, means paying fair homage to the soil, the winds, the waters, and honoring the very spirit of their places.

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