Ecology and Solidarity

A thematic unit proposed by **Réseau Canopé**

A unit by Véronique Granville

Teaching with cinema

4 short films with a total running time of 14 minutes.

De planéta

Leonardo Cavaletti, United Kingdom, 2013

Un carré pour la biodiversité

Morgane Boullier, France, 2015

Vagabond

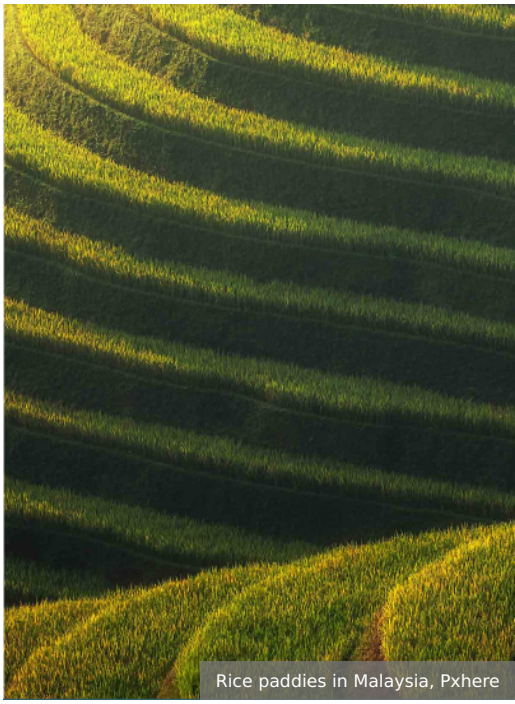
Pedro Ivo Carvalho, Denmark, 2014

Ecology and Solidarity

by Véronique Granville

What if we imagined a better world? What if it were possible to change the course of events and avert a planetary catastrophe?

What if each of us held in our own hands the power to create more equity, more solidarity and greater respect for the environment — for the protection of species and the safeguarding of our planet?



Rice paddies in Malaysia, Pxhere

Context

Place in the school curriculum

"The need to make pupils understand the imperative of a sustainable and equitable development of human habitation of the Earth, and the issues this involves, structures the teaching of geography in cycles 3 and 4. These questions introduce a new relationship to the future and enable pupils to learn to set their thinking within a long time frame and to imagine alternatives to what we assume to be an inevitable future."

Issues linked to education for sustainable development are present at every level of primary school in several learning domains: Exploring the world, Science and technology, and Moral and civic education too, with the notions of commitment and of individual and civic responsibility.

"Far from imposing dogmas or models of behaviour, moral and civic education aims at the acquisition of a moral and civic culture and a critical mind, whose purpose is to develop the dispositions that allow pupils to become progressively aware of their responsibilities in their personal and social lives. This teaching combines values, knowledge and practices."

The aim is very much to place pupils in an active, dynamic posture, so as to develop the skills and knowledge that help form an enlightened citizen — engaged, in their future adult life, in the service of balanced and sustainable personal and societal development.

Overview

Aim of the unit

What do we do in the face of time passing — time that draws us ever closer to a planetary disaster?

The objective of this unit, and the common thread running through these 3 films, is to weave a reflection on each person's responsibility and commitment to building a more ecological and more solidarity-minded world — the one not possible without the other.

It is about changing paradigms: building new relationships between people, and with our environment.

A thematic unit proposed by Réseau Canopé. Author of the unit: Véronique Granville

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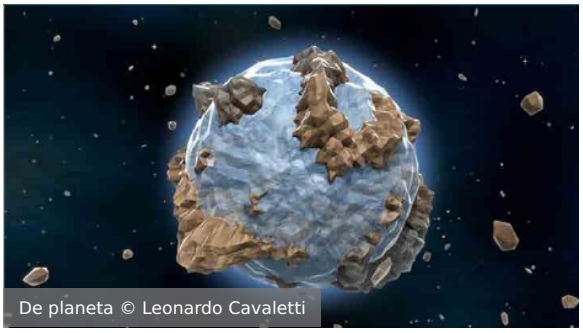
Presentation of the short films

3 short films with a total running time of 14 minutes.

« De planéta » unfolds, in under 2 minutes and to a frenzied Rossini score, the life and death of planet Earth, from the Big Bang to its destruction by humankind. The Earth spins on its axis and metamorphoses before our eyes, changing geological or historical period at high speed — illustrating both the destructive impact of human occupation and, at the infinite scale of the universe, the smallness and fragility of our species as it rushes blindly towards its own annihilation.

3D animation, 1 min 56 s · Production: NCCA, United Kingdom, 2013 · Direction: Leonardo Cavaletti


De planeta © Leonardo Cavaletti

Un carré pour la Biodiversité © Morgane Boullier

« Un carré pour la biodiversité » paints, with great delicacy and in small touches, the teeming world of a square of wild grass doomed to destruction by a lawnmower — an allegory of our industrialised societies laying waste to every wild and natural space. It is a contemplative, observant and committed little girl, symbol of a new generation, who finds the way to preserve the species — and with them, the future of our life on Earth.

Production: CPIE du Périgord-Limousin, France, 2015 · Direction: Morgane Boullier · 2D animation, 5 min 45 s

« Vagabond » takes place in a futuristic world where the industrialised, consumerist capitalist utopia has turned into a nightmare. Humanity is represented by an infernal machine peopled with depersonalised beings, hurtling through the absolute darkness of pollution of every kind. Two characters alone concentrate all the light and colour: a vagabond and a dog. They represent what is left of life, hope and solidarity. Their friendship, stronger than destruction, will open a new path onto an unsuspected universe of beauty and natural purity.

2D animation, 7 min 25 s · Production: The Animation Workshop, Denmark, 2014 · Direction: Pedro Ivo Carvalho

Vagabond © The Animation Workshop

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Thematic and cinematographic analysis

These wordless films share a strong poetic and allegorical dimension, with differing aesthetics and artistic choices that consistently lead the viewer to:

. Imagine, make inferences, interpret, seek to construct meaning.
. Reflect, mobilise knowledge, take a position on a thesis, build a line of thought, develop an opinion.
. Identify with the characters, project oneself, show sensitivity and empathy, feel and be moved.
. Observe a film as a work of art, identify its artistic particularities, make connections, link it to other known works (music, literature, painting...). Mobilise a shared culture.

Pedagogical implementation

Watching the films should make it possible to work on different learning domains, in an approach that values interdisciplinarity and cross-curricular links — the connection between the spoken and the written word.

Comprehension and meaning-building strategies are at the heart of the approach. The aim is to start from what is seen in order to develop interpretation skills and the ability to express oneself and debate, moving towards more specific knowledge depending on the domain.

The pedagogical implementation should make it possible to explore certain essential aspects of the films in depth, working in sequences that bring several films together according to their common features and to targeted objectives.

4 Sequences

Sequence 1: French
A narrative to understand, a story to write.

Sequence 2: Moral and civic education
Dilemmas and debates.

Sequence 3: French
Reading and poetic creation.

Sequence 4: Education for sustainable development
A square for biodiversity in the school.

Biodiversity, Pxhere

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Sequence 1: A narrative to understand, a story to write (French)

« Vagabond » and **« Un carré pour la biodiversité »** have several points of convergence: the narrative is built entirely from the images; not a word is spoken. Comprehension relies on inferences drawn from the characters, their expressions and their actions. In both cases, a lone character — different from the others, isolated within the anonymous crowd — uses their freedom and individual strength to stand against the way things are and commits to living differently, building a patch of world that is fairer, more equitable and more united with all the living beings around them.

Vagabond © The Animation Workshop

The sequence draws on this convergence and unfolds in several stages:

1.

Watch the two films. Oral discussion and questioning phase around the films: summarise the story, produce a pitch for each film, describe the characters and draw up identity cards for them, define the quest and the commitment of the two heroes, give one's opinion, debate the values at stake.

2.

Using a mind map, compare the two films, establish the key words and identify the narrative, symbolic, ethical and moral points of convergence.

3.

Imagine the characters' thoughts and dialogue. Act out the words orally, supported by freeze-frames of key moments in the films.

4.

Writing project: write the discursive part of the films — putting into written words, in comic-strip form with thought bubbles and monologue/dialogue, a series of images taken from the film and organised chronologically in panels following the order of the story.

Sequence 2: Dilemmas and debates (moral and civic education)

"Practice of philosophically-oriented discussion around situations that bring personal and collective values and choices into play, or based on imaginary situations: asserting oneself in a debate without imposing one's point of view, and accepting that of others. Being able to explain one's choices and actions."

The three films in the selection make it possible to organise one or more debates on key notions of the curriculum: commitment, individual and collective responsibility, the distinction between personal and general interest, and values such as fraternity and solidarity. In each of the scenarios, these aspects are approached in a different way. In **« Vagabond »** and **« Un carré pour la biodiversité »**, two seemingly insignificant, isolated characters show such courage and humanity that they transfigure the world. Finally, though apparently devoid of characters, **« De planéta »** carries within it all of humankind since the dawn of time. People appear implicitly in the monuments that spring up and succeed one another on the Earth's crust over the centuries — symbols of civilisations, and of a collective responsibility on the road to chaos.

De planeta © Leonardo Cavaletti

The sequence draws on these key points and unfolds along several lines:

1.

Watch the films and hold an oral exchange around the notion of value. What is a value, a principle? Which values are present in the films? Who carries them, who brings them to the fore?

2.

Debate No. 1, based on a situation taken from one of the films: the vagabond risks his life to save a dog's. Can we — should we — put ourselves in danger to come to someone's rescue? In what cases should we act at the risk of our own life? How do we resolve the dilemma between our personal interest and survival on the one hand, and respect for or the protection of others on the other?
See: http://cache.media.eduscol.education.fr/file/EMC/01/3/ress_emc_dilemmes_ethique_464013.pdf

3.

Debate No. 2, based on pupils' own experience: each in its own way, the films show that human occupation of the Earth disrupts natural rhythms and endangers vital balances. And yet — like the little girl who wants to save the biodiversity of a square of wild grass — what can each of us do, at our own level, to stand against a way of life that is devastating the planet? Can we act individually, on a small scale? What courage does it take, in everyday life, to fight and commit to a cause that is bigger than ourselves? What project could we carry out in the school?

4.

Debate No. 3, around solidarity: What is solidarity? What different faces does it wear in the different films? How can we be an eco-citizen who acts in solidarity? In what ways can solidarity be a dilemma, raise obstacles, or entail giving things up? When do we have to choose? What are the limits of "every man for himself" where the environment is concerned?

Sequence 3: Reading and poetic creation (French)

The poetic dimension is ever-present in the films of this unit; the link with poetic language offers a bridge to writing, to reading and to the production of written work.

The literary and personal-development stakes fall within this objective in the school curriculum: "Imagining, telling and celebrating the world: discovering poems and words of celebration belonging to different cultures; understanding the capacity of language to speak the world, to express the relationship between human beings and nature, to dream about the origins of the world; discovering fables that question certain foundations of society and morality."

The sequence is built around a network of readings: "poems from different centuries, celebrating the world and/or bearing witness to the creative power of poetic speech" and "fables raising questions of morality, poems or songs expressing commitment".

Un carré pour la Biodiversité © Morgane Boullier

A class creation, ages 10-11

Neither Men nor Gods must destroy her.

On the contrary, let us celebrate her!

Let us all work to protect her, to keep her safe.

Urgent are the calls for help from our forests, our rivers, our oceans, from all living beings.

Let us join our forces, let us take up the weapons of commitment

And let us save the Lady — princess, goddess — who makes our planet a paradise on Earth.

The different phases can be:

1.

Reading of the poetic texts in a variety of ways: silently; aloud in front of the class; listening to and viewing audio or digital recordings; with voice work or accompanying images; recitation of selected texts...

2.

Questioning and oral exchange on what was felt, deepening of comprehension, interpretative debate and work on what is implicit in poetic language.

3.

A more specific study, focused on written language and on the syntactic and macro-textual construction of several poems: identifying a structure, bringing out a framework with parameters of versification, stanzas, refrains... Analysing a few figures of speech that contribute to the construction of meaning; establishing the link between the words and the poetic images they generate.

4.

Writing project: starting from a poetic text that has been studied and decoded fully and precisely, propose a collaborative writing project on short, characteristic poems — for example acrostics whose vertical word belongs to the themes addressed in the sequence.

5.

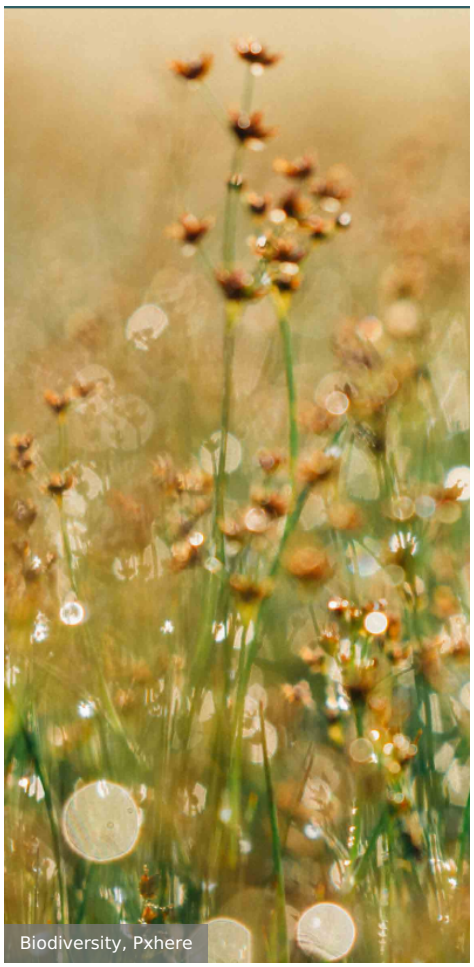
An illustrated exhibition of the poetry workshop's productions.

Sequence 4: A square for biodiversity in the school (education for sustainable development)

The "Exploring the world" domain in cycle 2 is particularly called upon to carry out a project matching the film **« Un carré pour la biodiversité »**.

"This first discovery of science concerns matter in all its forms, living or not, naturally present in our environment, transformed or manufactured, combining lived experience, questioning, the observation of nature and experimentation with the intellectual construction of first simple models or concepts, making it possible to interpret and explain."

Building a garden square, given over to grasses, wild plants, insects, earthworms and more, should make it possible to develop knowledge, as well as attitudes of observation and investigation, in order to build understanding.



Biodiversity, Pxhere

The sequence follows this plan:

1.

Watch the film; oral questioning to define the notions at stake: biodiversity.

2.

Launch the project: search for all the equipment and materials needed; draw up a collective work plan.

3.

Mobilise partners for a collective, unifying approach: the town council, parks and gardens services, parents, local or neighbourhood associations. Make contact, present a project, request help with targeted needs: orally and in writing.
Begin building the "garden squares" in a defined spot within the school: mark out a square to protect it from any human action. This makes it possible to show that leaving nature alone naturally allows an ecosystem — and the plant and animal species associated with it — to develop, and thus to raise awareness of the risks of human intervention.

4.

To this end, carry out a series of observations, records and analyses over the long term, in order to understand how an ecosystem of plant and animal life builds itself in a preserved natural space.

5.

Formalise the learning in a "science notebook" with diagrams, photos, texts read and written, vocabulary, graphs — all kinds of data that provide the means of learning and of consolidating knowledge.

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Extensions and links with the Arts

Cross-curricular resources.

Water Lilies, Claude Monet, 1906. Art Institute of Chicago

Despite their distinctive aesthetics, the four films converge on a fundamental notion that also runs through every level of the school curriculum: the living environment.

1.

Landscapes — natural, or shaped by human hands — are at the centre of the question of ecology and solidarity: with the issue of urban planning as a means of founding a fairer, more harmonious society (or not); with the threat of human over-occupation of territories to the detriment of other species; and with the impact on natural balances caused by the disfigurement of landscapes (deforestation, ocean pollution, the drying-up of lakes, desertification...).

Landscape, anonymous, 1750, MET

2.

Landscapes are at the heart of the visual arts, and of photography in particular.

Resources:
http://www.yannarthusbertrand.org/fr/books/la-terre-vue-du-ciel-un-portrait-aerien-de-la-planete
http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid4714/21-affiches-pour-comprendre-la-biodiversite-a-l-ecole.html

A pictorial and artistic journey into the heart of our planet's landscapes, seen from the sky, should help make pupils sensitive to natural beauty and diversity, and to the great variety of ways in which humans shape their territories according to cultures and natural constraints.
It is also a means of observing the ravages of unbridled urbanisation, of polluting industrialisation and of runaway climate change.
It is, finally, an ideal support for sharpening the eye and building image-reading strategies.