

MAKE THE FUTURE!

HANDS-ON SUSTAINABILITY LESSONS

FOR YEARS 7 & 8

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TEACHERS' INTRODUCTION

“A strong theme to emerge was the notion that the adults in our society are discomforted at best and indifferent at worst to making the necessary adjustments and changes required for a sustainable future. (Groundwater-Smith, 2008, p. 9)”

One winter day in 2015, I discovered something alarming.

I was reading a paper by the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities about the role of student voice in designing a framework for sustainability education in schools. The author, Honorary Professor Susan Groundwater-Smith, had interviewed students from 10 different schools around New South Wales to find out what they knew and how they felt about sustainability and climate change. She found that in all schools the students demonstrated ‘a deep and profound concern for the environment’ (Groundwater-Smith, 2008). But she also noted that ‘a strong theme to emerge was the notion that the adults in our society are discomforted at best and indifferent at worst to making the necessary adjustments and changes required for a sustainable future’ (Groundwater-Smith, 2008, p. 9).

Aghast, I read on as the paper described students’ frustration at this complacency, as well as their belief that they, being children, were not taken seriously in their efforts to express or enact ideas that could improve our world.

The concept for *Make the future!* crystallised in my mind then and there. Knowing that there were thousands of teachers out there who spend every day making sure their students *are* empowered and listened to, I decided to create a set of learning tools that could help them strengthen children’s ability to accomplish positive change.

The *Make the future!* series is designed around a definition of sustainability from the Australian Government’s Sustainability Curriculum Framework, which notes that ‘sustainability is about reducing our ecological footprint while simultaneously improving the quality of life that we value – the “liveability” of our society’ (Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2010). In the four years I’ve spent researching for this series, I’ve found that, contrary to common perception, the first part of this statement is eminently achievable by school students. Information on climate change and pollution from a wide range of authoritative sources, including the United Nations, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Environmental Protection Authority Victoria shows that, in fact, a teenager with a shopping list can reduce their family’s environmental impact far more effectively than an adult with an electric car.

TEACHERS' INTRODUCTION

But what of the second part of our sustainability definition? The idea that living sustainably can mean improving one's quality of life seems counterintuitive. Many of the students and staff members I spoke to during my research equated a reduced ecological footprint with a fairly grim lifestyle. After all, wouldn't that mean buying expensive eco-gadgetry, restricting yourself to destinations within biking distance, and spending your evenings sitting around in shapeless, homespun clothing, telling stories of the good old days when electricity was cheap by the light of a single LED?

The short answer: definitely not! The longer answer involves understanding what people consider an improved quality of life to be. One of my approaches to this was to survey students on what their ideal world would be like. To my surprise, the majority of their replies fell into three main categories:

- health (there would be no cancer/heart attacks/disease/drugs; I could eat my favourite food every day)
- prosperity (all the stuff you need would be free; there would be no homelessness/war/crime/poverty)
- exploration (you could change the way you/your clothes/your house look; you could travel wherever you wanted or see through other people's eyes).

These ideas actually align brilliantly with many of the shifts in lifestyle patterns required to reduce our ecological footprints. Following the dietary guidelines that are shown to lead to improved health outcomes (such as increased fruit, vegetable and wholegrain intakes and reduced saturated fat and free sugar intakes) also leads to consumer patterns that significantly reduce expenditure, water use, greenhouse gas emissions and packaging waste. Upcycling and repurposing items students and their families already have cut the amount of money they need to spend at the same time as eliminating the resource use and pollution involved in producing a new item. And the ability to make things themselves – whether that's a healthy meal, a customised outfit or a household product – does something more than protect the environment and save funds. It also allows students to explore and express that sense of self and individuality that is so crucial in adolescent development and builds a repertoire of key life skills on which they can draw as they transition to adulthood.

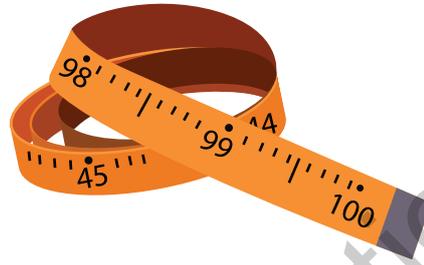
Since I began writing this series, climate strikes and increasing levels of activism by students have underlined their deep concern about environmental issues. As educators, we have the potential to address this concern and to demonstrate that making a change for the better is feasible – and also delicious, colourful, experimental, stylish, economical and fun! This book is designed to help you explore these concepts with your students and to help them carry their ideas and skills beyond the classroom. Their future, after all, is their own to make.

As educators, we have the potential to address [students' deep concern about environmental issues] and to demonstrate that making a change for the better is feasible:

TEACHERS' NOTES

FIBRES

UPCYCLING MATERIALS



Upcycling – using unwanted materials to create something new and better – is at the core of many of the topics in this book. To that end, it can help to start collecting items for upcycling before introducing these projects. Since these materials are often viewed as waste, they are usually easy and cheap (or free) to obtain.

Ideally, all of the fabrics and clothing needed for students' projects would come from their own homes, but sometimes this is not possible. In that case, op shops are an excellent source of cheap materials. You could also try asking for donations of suitable unwanted items in the school newsletter. Second-hand materials that would be useful for the projects in this book include:

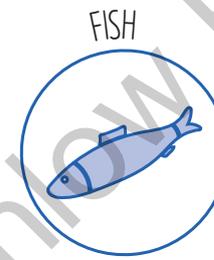
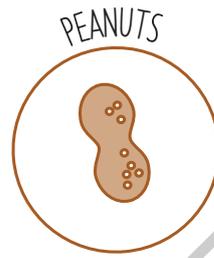
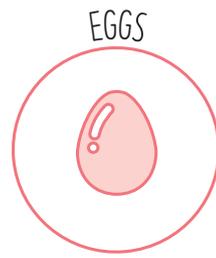
- t-shirts
- sheets or tablecloths
- jeans
- belts
- clothing with holes or stains
- outgrown or oversized clothing
- other fabric items, especially those with a large amount of fabric or made of natural fibres
- elastic, especially widths suitable for waistbands (e.g. 15 millimetre width or greater)
- ribbons, buttons, zips and other haberdashery.



FOODS

ALLERGIES, INTOLERANCES AND SPECIAL DIETS

All of the recipes in the *Make the future!* series are free from (or show options for making them free from) the major allergens:



Since the recipes are completely plant based, they are also suitable for vegetarian, vegan and many faith-based diets.



Of course, this doesn't do away with the need to check the labelling on all ingredients carefully if your students have known sensitivities! And it is always a good idea to reinforce with students the importance of not sharing any equipment or ingredients that have come into contact with a potential problem food.

Nutrition Information

Servings per package – 16
Serving size – 30g (2/3 cup)

	Per serve	Per 100g
Energy	432kJ	1441kJ
Protein	2.8g	9.3g
Fat		
Total	0.4g	1.2g
Saturated	0.1g	0.3g
Carbohydrate		
Total	18.9g	62.9g
Sugars	3.5g	11.8g
Fibre	6.4g	21.2g
Sodium	65mg	215mg

Ingredients: Cereals (76%) (wheat, oatbran, barley), psyllium husk (11%), sugar, rice, malt extract, honey, salt, vitamins.

STUDENTS' INTRODUCTION



Sometimes it seems like all the power in the world is in the hands of adults.

Adults make the laws. They run the governments. They control the money, the transport, the farms and the factories. So, it can seem like there's no way to save the world except by convincing adults to save it.

But that's not the case.

STUDENTS' INTRODUCTION

You see, what most people don't realise is that some of the biggest impacts on the environment come from our own everyday choices. Research shows that actions teenagers can take – like deciding what to eat, wear and buy – can make more of a difference to their family's environmental footprint than an adult buying an electric car.

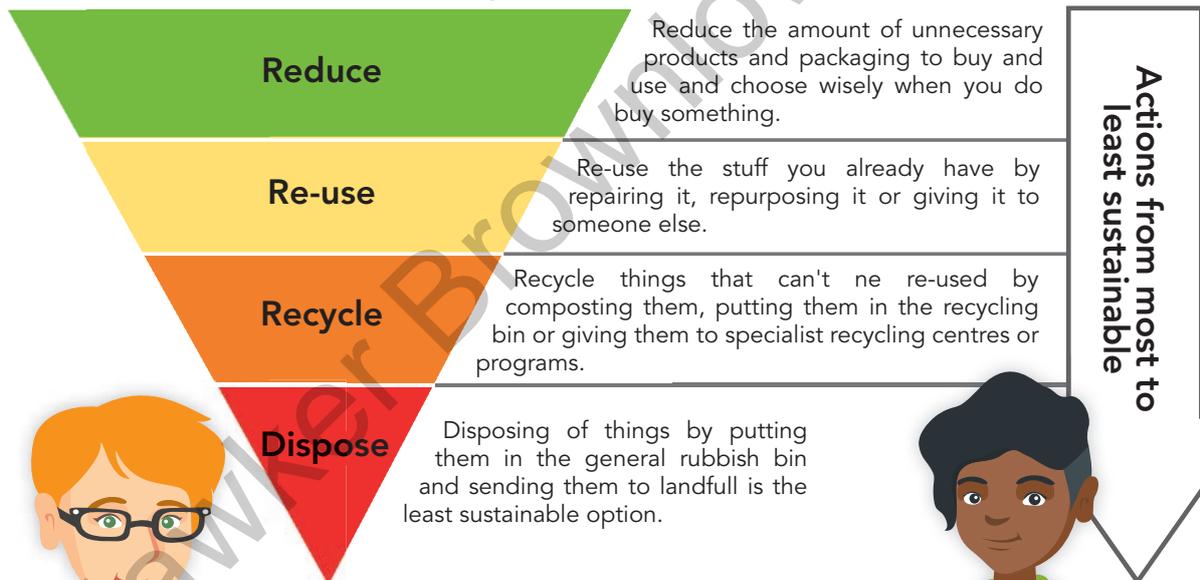
And it's not just the environment that benefits, either. In the *Make the Future!* series, we like to use this definition of sustainability: 'Sustainability is about reducing our ecological footprint while simultaneously improving the quality of life that we value – the "liveability" of our society' (Australian Government Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2010, p. 4).

In other words, sustainability means looking after our planet at the same time as making our lives better. And it's totally possible. Choices that help the environment can also keep you healthier, save you money and even boost your personal style (yes, really). This book is designed to show you some of the ways this win-win version of sustainability can be achieved.

Before we begin, take a minute to look at this waste hierarchy. It gives you a decent starting point from which to work in learning how to live more sustainably.¹



The Waste Hierarchy



By the way, once you've learned some of the skills you need to live more sustainably, feel free to pass them on to the adults around you. Let's face it, a lot of adults could use a little education!

1. There are lots of other versions out there, but they all share the same basic idea.