Approaching the School Climate Solutions Challenge

Description:

The School Climate Solutions Challenge was launched in 2018 by the National Wildlife Federation in tandem with the release of Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*.[1] This challenge gives students the opportunity to develop project ideas related to confronting climate change and building resilience. Our main goal is to give students a place to use their creativity and new knowledge on climate change to engage with a related issue that matters to them, and share this passion with their peers by presenting their work, in any way you choose.

Upon submission, students have the potential to win up to $20,000 to develop their project. With this lesson, we can highlight a real-world opportunity and introduce students to a global community of climate activists, but it is important to remember that the grant opportunity should not overshadow the effort and care students put into their projects. Considering this, you may choose not to disclose the grant aspect of the challenge, or wait until the project plans are complete. Overall, this lesson is flexible and can be catered to fit the needs and interests of any class.

In addition, project-based learning helps students develop a range of skills, realize that their actions matter, and gain a sense that they can make a difference. Action projects are designed to impact both the recipients (community members, ecosystems health, etc.) and the students. This transformation is accomplished by combining opportunities that link the project with self-reflection and the acquisition of skills, values and knowledge.

Objectives:

- Design, evaluate, or refine a solution to a complex real-world problem, based on scientific knowledge, student-generated sources of evidence, and other criteria
- Increase engagement and content knowledge through instruction strategies that are place- and problem-based while integrating the tenets of design thinking
- Communicate scientific or technical ideas
- Identify an area of interest related to climate
- Apply knowledge to solve a problem related to their chosen climate topic
- Participate in the youth climate movement, led by students to address these issues
- Become inspired by the various projects created and implemented by students around the world, through the School Climate Solutions Challenge

Vocabulary:

Feasibility, grant

Materials:

- May vary depending on student projects
- Computers, laptops or tablets with internet access
- The film, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*

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[1] http://www.inconvenientsequeleducation.org/

Background Information:

Watch "An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power" with the class. This film is packed with information on climate change that will help frame the project outlined in here, and will serve as the background information content. The film is readily available online for free streaming (on Crackle and other streaming services) or purchase.

This lesson highlights a great, pre-designed option for student action projects, which can be some of the most effective ways students can apply the knowledge they learn in the classroom and retain this information long term.

Creating opportunities for students to learn about the world around them and apply this learning to solving authentic problems caused by climate change in their daily lives, as engaged citizens, helps students develop a range of skills and builds a STEM literate population for the future.

Of course, student action projects are not limited to the School Climate Solutions Challenge. Be sure to keep an eye out for problems, challenges and resources students can utilize while learning about climate change. Check out the action section of DEP's Climate Resources document for more ways students can get involved.

Method:

- Engage the class in a short discussion about the film. Explore the film's watch kit, which provides discussion questions and activities that encourage a thorough reflection.

- After watching the film, introduce students to the School Climate Solutions Challenge. The submission dates might not line up with the time of this lesson, but it is still a great opportunity to work on a real-world project and become involved in larger scale initiatives.
- Go through the criteria for the challenge with your class, with an emphasis on: "Identify[ing] a problem their project/idea will solve and demonstrate an understanding of the issues, show passion for wanting to be part of the solution and have the potential to leverage the power of young people to inspire others and build public support for climate action."[2]
- Give students the resources required to research their chosen topic and develop their solution.
- Encourage students to use various mediums to present their project (PowerPoint slides, video, poster board, essay format, etc.) based on what is available and students' comfort with using these tools.
- Organize a mini-conference where students present their projects to the class, or the larger school community. The presentations can be done as smaller-scale workshop sessions or formal presentations to the entire group.

Extension:

- Go through the extensive "An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power" watch kit, which provides about 3.5 hours of in-class activities that go in tandem with the film, which is available for free online.

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[2] Truth To Power: School Climate Solution Challenge Official Information and Guidelines

- After students present their ideas – the class can discuss and vote on their favorite projects, then team-up to implement them.
- Organize a school-wide screening of "An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power", and host a question and answer session after the screening.
- Present projects at a local town hall, or engage with local elected officials to discuss their issue of choice. How is your topic being addressed already? If it is not being addressed, are there other places around the world that can be used as a model for future projects? Research and discuss.
- Participate in a unique opportunity to engage in city policy making and project design by submitting an idea for city improvement to the City Council; "Through Participatory Budgeting, community members - like you - directly decide how to spend at least $1,000,000 of the public budget in participating Council Districts."[3]

Source: New York City Participatory Budgeting

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For more information visit www.nyc.gov/dep

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[3] New York City Council Participatory Budgeting Idea Submission Page