9-12: All Things are Connected: Native American Philosophy

Subjects
Social Studies, Language Arts

Skills
Analyzing, communicating solutions, defining problems, interpreting

Materials
Student sheet on Chief Seattle

Time
One Class Period, homework

Vocabulary
Ecology, philosophy, ecosystem

Concept
All species in an ecosystem are connected. Hazardous waste entering the ecosystem will disrupt the balance.

Objectives
Students will examine how their actions affect the environment from a Native American perspective.

Background
Native American philosophies have certain dominant themes that are common to many indigenous cultures. One of these themes is the belief that humans are a part of and connected to their environment. A well known example of such thinking is the speech given by Chief Si’ahl (European settlers changed this name to Seattle) of the Duwamish Nation from the Puget Sound region.

Procedures and Activities
All Things are Connected
- In small groups, have students read and discuss the student hand out on Chief Si’ahl’s speech. Topics for discussion might include the historical background of the speech; an analysis of the speech in terms of its use of metaphor, simile, etc. and the relation of the speech to household hazardous waste.

I Am a Part of the Web
- In class and/or for homework, ask students to express their reaction to the reading and discussion (through drawing, poetry, short story, dramatics, etc.).
- Ask students to consider how they are a part of the web of life and what actions they can take to minimize their environmental impact on the Earth.
Common Core Alignments

GRADE 9-10

CC.RH.9-10.4
Reading in History/Social Studies: Craft & Structure

CC.SL.9-10.1
Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration

CC.W.9-10.4
Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing

GRADE 11-12

CC.RH.11-12.2
Reading in History/Social Studies: Key Ideas & Details

CC.SL.11-12.1
Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration

CC.W.11-12.4
Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing

All Things Are Connected

Connections are sometimes hard to recognize. The relationship between household hazardous waste and Native American philosophy is one of those connections that seems obscure. On the surface, these two topics seem totally unrelated. Yet, if you read the following excerpt from a speech given by a well-respected Native American leader, you may be able to see how these topics are related. This speech was given by Chief Si’ahl, commonly known as Chief Seattle, from the Duwamish Nation in 1855. Chief Si’ahl gave this speech concerning the sale of land to Governor Isaac Stevens in what is now the city of Seattle, Washington.

Chief Si’ahl was born in 1790, about the time when his nation first made contact with white traders from Canada and the newly formed United States. During his lifetime, he experienced many differences between the Duwamish culture and European settlers’ culture. Chief Si’ahl describes an important Duwamish cultural belief in the following excerpt from his speech. Perhaps it was a warning to those who were taking control of the land, the very lifeblood of his people.

“...whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the sons of the Earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves. This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons of the earth. Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself …”

“The whites too shall pass, perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Continue to contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste … So if you sell your land, love it as we’ve loved it. Care for it as we’ve cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you take it. And with all your strength, with all your mind and with all your heart, preserve it for your children and love it.”