

From *As if the Earth Matters- Recommitting to Environmental Education* by Thom Henley and Kenny Peavy

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Save the Earth!

We're not talking about planetary survival here. The Earth doesn't need to be "saved", nor are humans capable of saving it. What we do need to save is the Earth as we like it to be – with its climate, air, water, soil and biodiversity intact – and as we've always known it. If we mess that up, the planet will shake us off as quickly as it has discarded countless species before us.

It is sobering to realize that all species ultimately go extinct, just as it is encouraging to know that most species survive an average 3-5 million years before their demise. Hominoids (upright apes) have only been populating the Earth for approximately 2 million years, and *Homo sapiens* ('wise' man) have only been around a mere 100,000 years. It's entirely possible that the best years for our species still lie ahead. How wisely we address the dilemmas facing humanity in this century will ultimately decide how worthy we are of survival.

Save the Earth is a sport-like activity that should leave a lasting impression on all its players. You will need a large field and a ball for this game, basketball-size or bigger. A strong, inflatable Earth globe is ideal, but any large blue rubber ball can be painted (green and brown for land masses, and white for swirling clouds) to resemble the Earth as viewed from space.

Before the start of the exercise, challenge your students to identify the gravest dangers humanity faces today. War, famine, overpopulation, deadly disease, genocide,

biodiversity loss, climate change, ozone depletion and growing inequality between the haves and have-nots, are likely to top most lists.

Print out names of these 'Earth Dangers' on large index cards or construction paper and attach them with safety pins to the shirt front of half the players. The other half of the students will become the 'Earth Savers'. They can be distinguished by use of blue or green cloth strips worn as head bands or arm bands.

The game is played like football or rugby with two end zones. The object of the game is for the 'Earth Savers' to move their Earth ball from one end of the field to the other. The Earth Dangers have the objective of impeding the path of their opponents, either by tagging them, or stealing the ball. The rules of engagement are as follows:

- an 'Earth Saver' can hold or run with the ball up to 3 seconds before they must pass it to another on their team
- an 'Earth Saver' tagged by an Earth Danger must forfeit the ball to his/her opponent and return to their end zone to start over
- an 'Earth Danger' player that tags out an 'Earth Saver' can kick the ball on the ground back in the direction the 'Earth Savers' are advancing from. Only another 'Earth Saver' can retrieve this ball.
- if a passed ball is intercepted by an 'Earth Danger', that person runs with it back to the Earth Saver end zone for the play to start over.



Needless to say, it is nearly impossible for the 'Earth Savers' to cross the field to the opposite end zone under these stacked rules. Allow for time outs every 6-10 minutes so the players can catch their breath and have 60 seconds to discuss strategies in a huddle. Hopefully, at some point the 'Earth Savers' will come to the realization that their most determined efforts are doomed to fail unless they modify their attack.

The rules state that a single player holding the ball may do so for only 3 seconds before they must pass it to another. But what if the entire team decides to move the ball as a tight group? No individual player could be tagged out as other players' hands could support the ball the moment any one player is about to be tagged. As long as the ball keeps moving from hand to hand within the central group of players, the 'Earth Savers' would be able to cross the field.

Another possible strategy would be to position two players in the center of a circle of 'Earth Savers' all holding hands. The center players could hand the ball back and forth to each other every three seconds while the circle fights off 'Earth Dangers' as their team crosses the field. There are other possible strategies that the 'Earth Savers' could devise to be successful.

The objective of this activity is not a sporting event at all, but for the players to realize the extraordinary level of creativity and cooperation that will be required for humanity to save itself from the dangers it faces.

Following the game, gather everyone together to de-brief and process what happened.

Was there a sudden change in consciousness of one or more individuals that brought about a successful strategy? Are there any parallels in human society that give us cause to hope that a dire situation might suddenly be turned around? Are such changes more likely to

be brought about from individual or group initiatives?

Be sure to address each of the 'Earth Dangers' the students wrote on their cards. Which of these issues do they feel is being adequately addressed? Which are not? What are the impediments to this? What can they, as students, do to help?

