

300,000,000!

IN THE USA

Concept:

Human behavior today will affect the quality of life in the future.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify personal goals to be achieved in 20 years.
- Discuss potential impacts of current population trends on their future lives.
- Collect and summarize news articles about population and environmental trends.

Subjects:

Science, Social Studies, Language Arts, Economics, Family and Consumer Sciences, Health

Skills:

Summarizing articles, creative writing, visualization

Method:

In creating a futuristic news telecast and a letter to a friend 50 years from now, students think about what their future might look like, given current realities, hopes and dreams.

Looking to the Future

Introduction:

It is valuable for students to think about what is possible, probable and preferable in their future lives. This activity is an excellent way to encourage futuristic thinking and also to determine whether students' thinking has changed as a result of what has been studied in class.

Materials:

Paper

Pen/pencil for each student

"Dear Friend" assignment sheet (one per student)

Video camera (optional)

Part 1: My Hopes for the Future

Procedure:

During the first month of the school year, ask students to write five things they want for themselves 20 years from now and five things they want for the larger society in 20 years. Collect their responses and, as a class, tally the results. What were the most popular responses? Were there any common themes amongst the given answers? What are any obstacles to these hopes becoming reality in 20 years?

At the end of the school year (or unit), repeat the exercise, and again tally the results for the class. How do the results compare? In what ways do they differ?

Part 2: News and Views

Students can only make educated guesses about what might happen in the future if they are aware of what is happening in the present. This activity encourages students to regularly read news publications, to make connections between articles and topics covered in class, and to use their imaginations to visualize the challenges and possibilities of the future.

Procedure:

1. Have students collect news articles and opinion pieces on human population trends and related environmental and social issues. You may assign students a few specific subjects or have all students looking for all subjects. Subjects may include, but are not limited to, the following:



Environment/Land Use



Population



Quality of Life

Air pollution	Mothers' and infants' health
Community action and involvement	Population growth
Endangered species	Population loss
Food resources/hunger	Social security
Global climate change	Soil erosion
Housing and homelessness	Waste disposal
Immigration and emigration (out-migration)	Water pollution
Loss of forests	

Have students assemble a weekly “newsbriefs” bulletin board and/or a monthly newsletter summarizing population and environmental news. To facilitate the summarizing approach, students should write a one- or two-sentence summary of each article they bring in and submit it along with the article.

- Have individuals or groups of 2-4 students use the topics from the present-day news articles they have collected to project how the future might be. Tell students to imagine they are working in a newsroom 40-50 years in the future. They must prepare a news telecast that includes news stories around the country related to population and environmental trends. If possible, have students videotape their telecasts and air them to the class. Discuss why they chose their particular vision of the future. You may decide to assign the same topics to multiple groups in order to illustrate different possibilities and visions.

Part 3: A Look in the Crystal Ball

By sharing ideas about their future, students gain a clearer understanding of the hopes and concerns of their peers, better appreciate each other’s similarities and differences and begin to actively plan for and imagine themselves in the future.

Procedure:

Tell students that you will be asking them several questions about their future during the class to spark discussion and begin to plan for the years ahead. After each question is asked, direct the question to a few random students who will share their views and ideas. Emphasize that the exercise is most effective when they visualize life and conditions in the future based on what they think is really possible or probable. (It is sometimes necessary to guide discussion away from fantastic, “techy” views of the near future.)

As an alternative or follow-up activity, have students select one of the following questions to answer in an essay or story about the future:

How are students taught in 50 years?

What subjects will schools teach in 50 years?

What hobbies will you have in 50 years?

What will be the most common and most popular occupations?

Where will be your favorite vacation spot and why?

What will be your ideal mode of transportation? Is this what most people will use?

What will rock concerts look like in 50 years?

You have created an award for companies — what will it be for?

What kind of person will be considered a hero or heroine 50 years from now?

What would you have liked to accomplish in 50 years? In 10 years?

What would you do with your life if you knew you could be healthy and live another 100 years?

What will be the most amazing invention after 50 years?

What will change about food in 50 years?

What are cities like 50 years from now? Will you live in one?

What do you fear most about the future?

What do you look forward to the most about the future?

Part 4: Dear Friend

This creative writing exercise invites students to consider how continuing human population growth could affect their own lives in the future.

Procedure:

Duplicate the assignment sheet on the back of this page and distribute it to students. You may wish to suggest how long their letters should be.

Name _____

Date _____

Student Worksheet
Looking to the Future
DEAR FRIEND

The U.S. population is expected to grow to 420 million by 2050. Think about what this means for your own life. How might your life change with 40 percent more people in the country?

Write a letter, dated 50 years from today, to an old friend you haven't seen in many years, perhaps someone you are friendly with now. Talk about what is happening in your life and reflect on how things have changed in 50 years. What is better in your life? What is worse?

Some possible things to consider: Think about your neighborhood and places you like to go. How have they changed? How do people get around? What kind of work and activities do you do? Do you live near your friends and family members? What are you most happy about? What are you most afraid of?