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THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL ANIMAL

Grades: 2 through 5

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: A Letter from the Universe (see below); two small boxes with a mirror fitted into one end of each and a small opening or flap at the other end to look through. Small “air-holes” can be made in the boxes to lend more authenticity, and they could be labeled “Do Not Open,” “Handle with Caution,” “Fragile,” “Keep Upright,” -- “Danger” for the “dangerous animal,” etc., -- to build suspense and curiosity; examples of “dangerous” and “powerful” human activities and personal activities; black/white board and chalk/markers

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Science, Language Arts, and with slight modifications, Science, and Health

This activity works especially well if you’ve already begun exploring some of the problems facing our planet.

Pertinent Information: Since “power” can be either positive or negative, it’s important to stress in this activity the **power of positive choices**.

1. Invite students to sit in a circle. Set the boxes in the middle of the group, in full view.
2. Tell students the following story:

“As I was on my way here, I passed through a forest, deep in thought, not really looking at where I was going. Suddenly I bumped into a large tree. When I looked at the tree, I saw this letter (hold up Letter From the Universe) tucked into a branch. I took it down, and to my surprise, saw that it was addressed to all of us! Under the letter were these two boxes (hold up boxes). I found this all a little puzzling, so I thought I’d bring the letter and boxes here so that we can solve the mystery together.”

“Shall we read the letter?” Open the letter (see below) carefully and read it aloud in a dramatic voice. Note: Making the letter look “authentic” can add to the mystery and magic of the activity.

3. Express curiosity about the animals who are in the boxes. How can these animals be so small and yet be so dangerous and powerful? Any ideas for the most dangerous?

(Accept all answers). What about most powerful? (Accept all answers).

4. Pick up box #1 and peek inside (peek so that you're looking through the opening/flap into the end with the mirror attached). Look shocked, and then pass the box around to the students.

Say: "So, who is the world's most dangerous animal? Us! Wow! How could this be? I'm a nice person; I know all of you are nice people. But still, I saw my own face in that box. Hmm. I guess we must be doing some destructive things that we aren't even aware of.

"Well, we still have this other animal to look at -- the world's most powerful animal. The letter said maybe this animal could help us solve the problems. Let's look." (Pass box #2 around.) "So, it looks like it's us again! It looks like we are both dangerous AND powerful. How can we be both?"

5. "Let's look together at some of our activities, and maybe this will give us a clue."

Ask students to brainstorm a list of human activities that are causing harm to other people, animals and the planet. (Depending on the class, you may wish to give them a couple of examples to get them started – factory and car pollution; urban sprawl, which destroys habitat; overpopulation, etc.).

Then ask the class to share some examples from their own lives of actions they've taken that have caused harm. (Give a couple of examples from your own life, if needed: driving a car instead of biking/walking; eating fast food burgers, etc.)

6. Say: "Look at all the destructive stuff done by us humans. We really can be dangerous! But the Universe showed us that we can be powerful, too! Let's look at some of our activities that do good."

Ask the class to brainstorm a list of human activities that cause less harm or are helpful to other people, animals and the planet. (Depending on the class, you may wish to give them a couple of examples to get them started – recycling, using alternative energy, building bike paths, protecting endangered species, etc.).

Then ask the class to share some examples from their own lives of actions they've taken that have helped/caused less harm. (Give a couple of examples from your own life, if needed: shopping at thrift stores, buying fair-trade items, etc.)

Alternative: If students are less familiar with the impact of our choices, you may wish to have them make a list of human (and personal) activities, and then together go over the list and decide which cause more harm and less harm.

7. Share that the actions we take every day are part of the problem, but we can choose to take actions that are part of the solution. Our choices are very powerful. And if more and more of us find out about these issues and change how we do things, we can be really powerful!

“OK, Universe, I think we got the message; we are ALL part of the problem, but we can all be part of the solution.”

Extensions:

1. Have students make pictures of themselves as the world's most powerful animal. They can make their drawing as imaginative or as real as they want (older students might prefer another medium). Then make a list of some of the things this powerful animal (you!) does now -- and especially things s/he promises to try to do to help the planet, other species, etc. Remind students to put their names on their drawings, because these are pictures of them. A display could be made of all the powerful animals, and the activities they do to affect positive change for the planet.

2. Have students choose one powerful positive action they're willing to take in their own lives to help the planet and everyone on it.

Letter From the Universe

Dear Friends,

I noticed that you have begun discussing the problems facing planet earth, such as (list examples here, e.g., pollution, habitat destruction, overpopulation).

Wonderful! You are beginning to use your thinking skills to reflect on the impact of humanity's choices and ways you can make choices that do more good and less harm.

In these two boxes are animals for you to observe. I hope they will help you to figure out more about what is happening to Earth and why. Be very careful with the animals in these boxes and **DON'T** let the animal in box #1 get out! In that box is the most **dangerous** animal in the world!

The animal in box #2 is a wonderful animal. When you know more about her (or him) you can introduce her to everyone you know. This is the most **powerful** animal in the world!

Starting with your teacher and with box #1, look inside the boxes, one by one. Pass them around very carefully and quietly, so as not to disturb either of them.

Thanks for trying to do something to save beautiful planet Earth.

Love, The Universe

Activity by Sandra Gabbriellini (former HECP Student)