**Protecting the Oceans which Protect Us All**

**Thinking about our oceans**

When you think of the ocean, what do you think of? Do you smell salt on the wind? Do you see glimmering blue reflecting the sun? Do you imagine surfers riding the waves? Or, do you think about your own breathing? Do you think about needing to wear a coat or take an umbrella to school? Because our ability to take a deep breath and the clothes we wear are all directly connected to the ocean. The world’s oceans produce more than 50% of the oxygen we breathe, help to keep our planet’s climate stable, and provides a main source of protein for over 3 billion people. And yet, many people, without even realizing it, are stealing away the ocean’s ability to keep us healthy and comfortable. Human activities—plastic pollution, rising ocean temperatures, and chemical pollution—are all taking a toll on our oceans.

Many young activists are taking the lead in trying to save our oceans. They are educating the people around them, creating campaigns to change people’s behaviors, and fighting daily to protect our oceans so that our oceans can keep supporting and protecting us all.

**Plastic Pollution: From Rivers to Oceans**

 According to the United Nations, 11 million tons (11,000,000) of plastic waste enter the ocean every year, much of it carried by rivers. Rivers are like highways for plastic trash, transporting garbage from cities and towns directly into the ocean. And the problem is not just the things we can see, like bottles and bags, but also microplastics. Microplastics are tiny pieces of plastic that are created when larger pieces of plastic break down. Microplastics are also often used in personal care products such as: body scrubs, body wash, makeup, deodorant, shampoo, and conditioner.

Sea animals sometimes mistake larger pieces of plastic for food and die from starvation. And microplastics can damage plankton (*various small plants, animals, and bacteria that drift in water, usually near the surface*), preventing the plankton from catching carbon from the atmosphere. If plankton cannot take CO2 out of the air, the yearly rise of temperatures might increase. Every animal in the ocean, from the largest whale to the smallest planktons, are at risk from plastics flowing into our oceans. And all of us who depend on the oceans to absorb CO2 are also at risk as well!

United Nations, Fast Facts-What is Plastic

**The Ocean Cleanup: tackling the problem at its source**

One of the largest efforts to address plastic pollution is *The Ocean Cleanup*, founded by Boyan Slat when he was just 18 years old. The project’s goal is to clean up 90% of floating plastic pollution by 2040. They do this by using new technologies and educating the public about plastic pollution on their website. But *The Ocean Cleanup* has also developed a special app. By using this app, volunteers can easily check the level of plastics in rivers and at beaches in their local area. This information helps *The Ocean Cleanup* to target their clean-up efforts on places with the most pollution. And it helps volunteers understand how plastics and microplastics are directly impacting their local environment

Visit the Ocean Cleanup website!

**Household products: an overlooked pollu****tant**

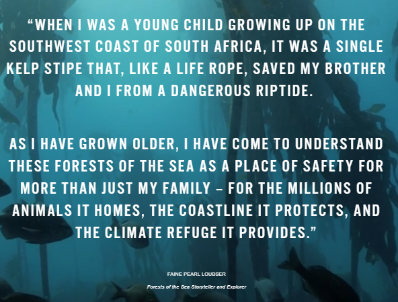
A beach in Temuco, Chile covered in dead sardines from algae “dead zones”.

****While we often talk about the damage of plastics, other pollutants—like dish soap and laundry detergent—are also having a damaging effect on our rivers and oceans. These everyday products often contain chemicals such as phosphates and surfactants that harm the ocean by causing algae to grow faster than usual. This large amount of algae lowers the amount of oxygen in the water, creating “dead zones” where sea animals cannot survive. In Japan, because of the large number of mountains, rivers flow quickly from local communities to the ocean. That means that chemicals from dish soap and laundry detergent that enters a river from a person’s house can reach ocean waters in just a few hours.

Betty Osei Bonsu lives in Uganda and works for the Green African Youth Organization. She helps to build Zero Waste City Models. Zero Waste Cities are communities where everyone is living in a way that helps keep our environment healthy. Elementary school students learn about what they can do at home and in their daily life to help protect the environment. This includes checking the cleaning products they are using to make sure they do not damage rivers and oceans. Zero Waste cities also support eco-clubs at universities. There is even a training program in these special cities for volunteer waste pickers and environmental community ambassadors so that everyone has a chance to educate, take action, and help build the kind of community we need to protect our oceans.

**Coral Reef & Kelp Forest Destruction: protecting our sea animals**

If the ocean is the heart of our planet, coral reefs and kelp forests are its lungs. The coral reef and kelp forest ecosystems are filled with marine species like sea lions, giant sea bass, sea turtles, crabs, and even sharks. Coral reefs and kelp forests protect coastlines, and also help local economies because of the large number of tourists who visit them. However, coral reefs and kelp forests are disappearing from our oceans due to warming waters, pollution, and over-tourism.

You might not know Faine Peral Loubser’s name or face, but she was the cinematographer for the popular Netflix documentary movie *My Octopus Teacher*. She works with The Sea Change Project and the Forests of the Sea project to raise people’s awareness of the importance of kelp forests. Most people do not know that currently kelp forests and coral reefs are disappearing more than twice as fast in our oceans as rainforests are disappearing on land. Faine is dedicated to telling stories through her movies and her SNS accounts which help all of us understand just how important the kelp forests are to the ocean and the world in general.

In Okinawa, community groups are taking a more direct approach to save coral reefs. *Okinawa Coral Reef Conservation Council* supports local groups such as the Tokashiki Diving Association which grows pieces of coral in nurseries and then transplants the new coral to damaged reefs. Local residents, schools, and even tourists are invited to join the coral transplanting activities! This helps everyone in the community to feel a sense of shared responsibility for the coral reefs.

But you don’t have to make movies or grow and transplant coral to help save our oceans. Traditional sunscreens containing the chemicals oxybenzone and octinoxate are one of the causes of coral bleaching (*coral bleaching: when corals eject the algae that lives inside them and turn white)*. damaging coral DNA and preventing healthy growth. Student led groups like *Protect Our Future* in the Cayman Islands, have started campaigns to educate people about the dangers of traditional sunscreens, provide alternatives, and even work to pass laws which will ban the sale and purchase of these sunscreens in their communities. And you can join them in their goals by buying ocean safe sunscreens before you go to the beach every summer!

**But what can I do: young activists think bigger, start campaigns!**

****Everyone can take actions to help protect our rivers and oceans. But taking an action is different than starting an environmental campaign. When we buy environmentally safe dish soap or recycle plastics at our house, we are taking action. But an environmental campaign tries to change the long term behaviors of a large group of people. And more and more environmental campaigns are being started by younger people. Let’s look at one campaign which started in Bali and now has spread across the world. It is the *Bye Bye Plastic Bags* campaign. The campaign was started by Isabel and Melati Wijsen when they were 10 and 12 years old. The campaign has four very important parts. These parts can be found in all environmental campaigns:

1. Educate: help people learn about the dangers of plastic bags to our environment
2. Take action: give people a list of actions they can take individually such as making your own shopping bags and directions for how to recycle more effectively in your house
3. Build connections: provide plans for Bye Bye Plastic Bags events and workshops to help people meet, support each other, and spread the message to new people!
4. Evaluate: collect data about the impact of the campaign to check if the campaign is successful and also to motivate people even more!



Visit the Bye Bye Plastic Bags website and learn more!

4) Bye Bye Plastic Bags’ results! Collecting data and showing results is an important part of any campaign!

The Bye Bye Plastic Bags campaign is a great example of the 4 necessary parts of any successful campaign:

1. **A**

Awareness: help people understand what is happening and how their current behaviors are related to the problem you want to solve.

**2) A**

Action: give people a list of steps they CAN do in their own lives to make a difference.

Evaluate: collect data and measure your campaign’s impact. Tell people all the good things you did and raise people’s AWARENESS MORE

**4) E**

Connection: make sure people have a chance to meet each other and support each other so they can have high motivation to keep taking action!

**3) C**

**A Shared Responsibility**

The ocean connects us all, from the shores of Hawaii to the islands of Japan. Its health is vital to all of our survival. But the health of the ocean now depends on the choices we make and the actions we take in our daily lives. And with those choices comes the power to shape the future for yourself and the people around you. Whether it’s planning and running an environmental campaign, participating in ocean cleanups, advocating for change with an SNS account, or simply being mindful of your choices, every step you take brings us closer to a healthier ocean—and a healthier planet.

**ACTIVITY: From Actions to Campaign**

There are steps all of us can take to help protect our oceans. Here is a list of 5. Try and add three more ideas of your own:

1. Be mindful of chemicals: Use eco-friendly detergents and cleaning products to reduce harmful runoff into rivers and oceans. Look for labels that say “phosphate-free” or “biodegradable.”
2. Don’t use body products with microplastics: do your research and make sure that your shampoos and makeup are safe for the environment
3. Support local cleanups: Participate in events like beach or river cleanups organized by groups like Kokua Hawaii Foundation in Hawaii or JEAN in Japan.
4. Advocate for Policies: Push for regulations that limit plastic use or promote renewable energy in your community.
5. Raise Awareness: Share information about ocean conservation on social media or through school projects.
6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
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**Which of the 8 actions do you think would be good to include in a campaign to help protect our oceans. Pick two actions which you think would work well in a campaign and write your reason:**

I think \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ would be a good action to add to a campaign because:

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Think of a name for your campaign: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_