



The SEEd Cabinet of Sustainability Curios is a growing collection of items designed to provoke thinking and discussion around Sustainability. Paired with the Critical Thinking questions on our website, we invite people to investigate what the objects mean to them, how they are used, and what impact they have on the earth. We invite you to send in your suggestions and add to this ongoing free teaching resource.

Maybe you could create your own Cabinet in the classroom using suggestions from your pupils or students? We'd love to see pictures of your creations and hear about the work you've produced.

Here's what in the Cabinet so far....

1. Trigger's Broom:

In the TV comedy series 'Only Fools and Horses', Trigger is the challenged, road-sweeping friend of the Trotters. On being awarded a medal for saving his local Council money, he proudly announced that he used the same broom for over 20 years. Over that time, he had replaced the broom-head 17, and the handle 14 times. It was still his broom. This is a great starting point for discussions over re-use, recycling and reducing - with some pretty interesting philosophy to boot!

- Themes: resource use; repairing and re-use

2. Glass milk bottles:

Once, most milk was delivered to household doorsteps in glass milk bottles; the milkman/woman would take away the empties for cleaning and re-filling, often driving an electric vehicle. Cleaning requires water and energy and delivery has its own costs....but glass also keeps milk fresher for longer. Glass can be recycled indefinitely and is made of sand (a highly abundant material) - unlike the plastic alternatives.

- Themes: Resource use; re-use; reducing plastic; water

3. Tree seedlings:

Planting trees is a great way to help our beleaguered wildlife and sequester carbon - dealing with two existential crises at once! The oak is a particularly good tree to grow as it plays host to more species of British wildlife than any other tree (over 300 species depend upon it) but is slow growing (so won't sequester as much carbon, in the short-term as other, more vigorous non-native trees). A seedling, if planted and nurtured for

three years, could live for 500 years, but will only start taking more carbon out of the atmosphere than it creates in six years from now. Planting trees will not save us from catastrophic climate change if we continue to burn fossil fuels; some think the call for planting millions of trees is a useful smokescreen or greenwash for not taking firmer action on stopping the burn.

- Themes: Climate change; biodiversity loss; nature's recovery

4. Reusable shopping bags:

Single-use plastic packaging and bags – as waste – are a serious problem in our seas, waterways and on land. This message is getting through, and re-useable and 'lifetime' bags are being used increasingly. That said, the waste we produce is still far from what it should be creating problems of sea dumping, landfill, and carbon emissions.

- Themes: Resource use and waste

5. 'Who gives a crap' toilet roll – FSC and ethical:

It is estimated that 42 million tonnes of toilet paper are used each year, globally – put another way, every day an area of forest the size of 50 London Wembley Stadiums is clear felled just to wipe our bottoms. This (mostly) recycled toilet paper is produced by an B Corps Australian company; the materials include post-consumer (recycled) wastepaper and bamboo. Any fresh pulp used is from sustainable FSC (Forestry Stewardship Council) registered forests. All shipping is now carbon neutral (using carbon offsets). 50% of profits are donated to 'ensure everyone has access to clean water and a toilet within our lifetime'. There are a host of other 'green' and sustainable products in our prize hamper!

- Themes: Water; resource use; equity; social justice; globalisation

6. Mobile phone:

We have never been more connected than now – and the mobile phone has been the greatest advance in global communications ever. More people connected and sharing, brings great benefits as well as potential threats – to our freedoms, our information, our views and attitudes amongst many others. How we manage this revolution is a key issue in sustainability. Of course, the phone itself – the object – can be a case study in resource use.... All the multiple components come from somewhere (think about the lithium, cobalt, and nickel alone – and the issues of mining and international security).

- Themes: Globalisation; equity; resource use

7. Exotic souvenirs:

Travel to far and distant lands broadens the mind and experience. This can come at a cost – the carbon emissions from travel, particularly by air, and when local economies do not benefit from the tourism dollar. Any of these objects can be used as starting points for discussion about tourism (eco, or otherwise), air travel, cultural appropriation, indigenous culture and knowledge and local economy.

- Themes: transport and travel; equity and social justice; globalisation

8. A plastic Earth globe (teaching aid):

This teaching aid has done the rounds with one of the SEEd Trustees! The image of the Earth from space, represented on this model, changed everything 50 years ago when the planet was viewed for the first time as a blue orb in the black nothingness of space.

- Themes: All... including resource use and waste (it's a plastic globe after all!)

9. Wind turbine:

The story of the rolling-out of renewable energy as one of the many positive technological advances toward a sustainable present and future is a great starting point. This rollout is not without controversy, particularly the impact of turbines on landscape.

- Themes: Climate change; energy; equity

10. Toy tractor and farm animals – the food and farming system:

From the amount of meat in our diets to the obesity crisis; from food security to pesticide/herbicide use; from animal welfare to the production of carbon and methane emissions; from soil degradation and water pollution to nature conservation and recovery; from 'just-in-time' distribution to 'local and seasonal'; from food waste to food poverty – all these are sustainability issues, and how we resolve them will determine how successful we are at addressing the climate, ecological and health and wellbeing crises.

- Themes: Food and farming; water; climate change; equity; social justice,

11. Room Thermometer/jumper/climate stripes:

How we keep our houses warm in winter and cool in summer is – excuse the pun – a hot topic right now. Fossil fuel energy prices are going through the roof as we have yet to wean ourselves off them in favour of renewables – and global heating continues toward catastrophic level. So, what can we really control, individually when it comes to taking action for climate change? The climate stripes is a striking image created by Professor Ed Hawkins at Reading University – each stripe represents a year, for the last 200, and shows clearly how the global average has risen in that time...and dramatically in the last 25 or so.

- Themes: Energy; climate change; equity and social justice

12. Dinosaur/mammoth/whale/polar bear:

Extinction is a natural process and species come and go. Sometimes, catastrophic events trigger mass extinctions (there have been 5 in the 3-billion-year history of the Earth), such as the asteroid impact of the Cretaceous that did for the dinosaurs. Humans have been responsible for extinctions down the ages, and it is thought that the woolly mammoth was helped on its way to extinction through the hunting. Humans have been the cause of the loss of countless species over the past few hundred years, and we're on track to cause the biggest mass extinction of them all – the 6th. The humpback whale and polar bear are symbols of this current loss, particularly through the effects of global heating at the poles and the warming of the seas.

- Themes: Ecological crisis; climate change

13. Desk Calendar – May 19th:

This was Earth Overshoot Day for the UK this year (May 19th 2022) If everyone in world consumed as we do in the UK, this is the day in 2022 we would have used up all the available planetary resources for this year – imagine having to live for another seven months on nothing. Check out Earth Overshoot Day at <https://www.overshootday.org>

- All....

14. \$64 a day – the ‘developed world perspective’:

In the book Factfulness (2018), the concept of the ‘developed’ vs ‘the developing’ world is challenged. Four global income levels are suggested based upon the available dollars per person per day (and the approximate number of people globally in that grouping):

Level 1 - \$1-2 per day (1 billion people); \$4 per day (3 billion people); \$16 per day (2 billion people); and \$64 per day (1 billion). This grouping is a great starting point for discussions about wealth, poverty, global impact, and population – and myth-busting. If you’re interested in looking at this further visit Gapminder.... <https://www.gapminder.org>

- Themes: Equity; social justice; economics and globalisation

15. A Doughnut:

Kate Raworth in her ground-breaking book Doughnut Economics, describes and new approach to the global economy where there is enough use of resources to provide the world’s population with good standards of social justice, food, water, health, education, resilience, equality, energy, and jobs without exceeding the Earth’s ability to provide them (without breaking the ecological limits – climate change, biodiversity loss, various forms of pollution and use of land and water). Kate designed a diagram to represent the sweet spot for the planet and humanity – a doughnut. Some cities are now adopting the model. Look at <https://doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics>

- Themes: Economics; Equity and social justice; ecological crisis

16. Compost:

Everything that was once living can be composted – turned from ‘waste’ into soil-nourishing compost. Much of the organic waste matter we produce – food and garden waste, poo and pee – is sent to landfill, burned or flushed away. If you have a garden, a well-managed compost heap will add nutrients to the soil and save money too; community composting, and encouraging local authorities to invest in such schemes, are also great sustainability ideas.

- Themes: Resource use; food and farming; biodiversity

17. Sustainability reading:

There’s so much to stimulate thinking about sustainability and learning out there...here are a few of the books that have influenced SEEd folk down the years and in recent times.

Theme: All....

18. White Christmas:

The idea of a white Christmas is something we might need to rethink as the world heats up and snow becomes an increasing rarity in the UK. Christmas has also become a time of mass consumption – how can we ensure a wonderful, jolly, yet sustainable, Christmastime?

- Themes: Resource use; climate change

19. Mended clothes:

Fast fashion relies upon cheap materials, labour and global distribution and transportation networks. Raw materials, like cotton, require large areas of land and inputs of water and fertiliser. The move toward more sustainable clothing, including reuse, repair, and upcycling, is a counter to this trend. Do we need to encourage a 'make do and mend' culture? How can fashion trends be further influenced toward sustainable fashion?

- Themes: Resource use and waste; water; social justice

20. Cars/trains/planes:

Moving goods and people around the globe exerts an enormous stress on the environment, from the building of the infrastructure (roads, railways, ports, and airports) to carbon and particulate emissions. Yet, our trading and economics systems rely upon it and the freedoms that individualised transport brings are prized by many people. So, what does a sustainable travel and transport system look like and how can we get there?

- Themes: Resource use; travel and transport; climate change

21. Fake grass:

Did you know that when fake grass fades it can be artificially tinted green again, and you can buy cans of spray that will make your plastic lawn smell just like freshly cut grass! Why do people decide to use fake grass in their gardens? What does this tell us about ourselves and our connections with nature?

- Theme: Resource use; ecological crisis/biodiversity

22. The 17 SDGs:

The Sustainable Development Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a 'blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all'. They were set up in 2015 by the UN and are intended to be achieved by 2030. Nested within the 17 goals are 169 separate targets.... See more at

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

- Themes: All....

23. Recycling symbol:

One of the most recognisable environmentally linked symbols, the recycling symbol has been around for over 50 years, originating on the first Earth Day in 1970.

- Themes: Resource use and waste; economics and globalisation

24. The Sustainability nested trio:

People have talked about the 'three pillars of sustainability' or the 'three-legged stool' - where environment, society and economy are seen as interwoven or 'equal'. SEEd and many other sustainability organisations would much rather use the 'nested model' of sustainability where key dependencies are the most important element of the model i.e., economy is something created and dependent upon society, and human society can only truly function if the natural processes of the world ('the environment' or 'nature') are working well and in a healthy state.

- Themes: Overarching....and all

25. A glass of water

We are 60% water, and we need clean, freshwater to survive – between 3-4 litres a day. Over 770 million people don't have access to clean water close to their home – that's about 1 in 10 of us.

Forced to drink unclean water, one child under the age of five dies every 2 minutes from diarrhoea; 1.7 billion people don't have a decent toilet of their own. In the UK we take our water for granted but, increasingly, we are experiencing drought and floods as the climate becomes more unpredictable, stretching our ability to farm and manufacture and our sewerage systems. In some parts of the world 'water wars' are brewing as countries compete their part of shared river systems.

- Themes: Water; resource use and waste; ecological crisis; equity and social justice

26. A mirror with the caption....'Is this the most dangerous animal on Earth?'

In the 1960s, one of the founders of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Sir Peter Scott, installed an exhibit like this in the foyer of the visitor centre at his world-famous nature reserve at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire.

60 years on, how does this exhibit make you feel and why?

