



Elementary School

Atmosphere – An invisible layer that surrounds and protects the Earth.

Biodegradable – Anything that can be naturally broken down and returned to the Earth. Bread and cherry pits are biodegradable, Styrofoam and plastic are not.

Carnivore – An animal that eats meat.

Compost – A collection of biodegradable waste that is no longer used by people or which died on their own. Examples are banana peels, coffee grounds, or leaves and branches. When mixed together they form a rich soil which many people use to help their gardens grow.

Consumption - To eat, use, or take in. For example, people consume food and water. People also consume energy.

Ecological Footprint – A way of measuring how much of an impact a person or community has on the Earth. Someone who uses more natural resources will have a bigger footprint than someone who uses less.

Ecosystem – A community of plants, animals, water, and air that depend on each other for survival.

Energy – A way to describe the use of power. Electricity is a form of energy usually created by a fossil fuel. It can also mean the capacity to do work.

Environment – This word can mean many different things. It can mean the area around you, or it sometimes just means nature. When we speak of protecting the environment, we usually mean we want to save plants and animals from danger, or we want to clean up the water and air.

Erosion – The term used to describe what happens when topsoil is washed or blown away.

Fossil Fuels – Fossil fuels come from organisms like dinosaurs that lived long ago and have been buried underground for many years. People use fossil fuels like gas, coal, and oil to create the energy that powers our cars, homes, and factories. There is a limited amount of fossil fuel on the Earth, and fossil fuels produce pollution when we use them for energy.

Global Warming – Also known as the “Greenhouse Effect”. When too many greenhouse gasses are trapped in the atmosphere, the temperature on the Earth changes. Different places on the Earth slowly get hotter or colder. If global warming goes on long enough, it could change rainforests to deserts and dry areas to wet ones.

Greenhouse Gas – The term given to any gas that traps heat in the Earth’s atmosphere. Greenhouse gasses allow the sun’s energy through to the surface of the Earth, but not back out, like a glass window around the Earth. Common greenhouse gasses are carbon dioxide and methane.

Herbivore – An animal that eats plants.

Natural Resources – Natural resources are found naturally on the Earth. We use natural resources in our daily lives when we eat, build, travel, and wear clothes. Water, coal, and trees are examples of natural resources.

Nonrenewable Energy – Energy that comes from sources that either can be used up or do not replace themselves. Fossil fuels are an example of nonrenewable energy.

Omnivore – An animal that eats both animals and plants.

Pollution - Anything that dirties the Earth. Litter is pollution, and so is the smoke that comes out of cars and factories. Even when we pour something into the water that doesn't belong there, it is pollution. There are no good things about pollution.

Recycle – Turning used items into new, often different items. Only certain materials are recyclable. Some recyclable materials include glass, plastic, aluminum cans, and paper.

Renewable Energy – Energy sources which can be used over and over again without running out. Water is an example (dams create energy from water). Renewable energy sources also include sunlight and wind power, which are not actually reused, but are so common that they are impossible to use up (inexhaustible).

Solar Energy - Energy that comes from the sun. The sun's light is caught by "solar panels" which turn the light into energy. Solar energy is a renewable energy source.

Sustainability – We will live in a sustainable world when everyone put together uses less resources than the Earth produces. A sustainable lifestyle would allow humans to live forever on Earth.

Topsoil – The layer of dirt closest to the surface of the Earth. Top soil is responsible for providing the nutrients that help plants grow.

Watt – Just as an inch is a measurement of distance, a watt is a measurement of energy use. A watt measures how much electricity something uses. For example, a light bulb uses about 60 watts of energy.

