

Green Literacy Thematic Unit Planning Template: Completed “How Systems Thinking Changes Our World” Unit

Name: *Wanda (five years of teaching experience)*

Grade level: *Fifth grade*

School context: *Suburban*

PHASE 1: ENGAGE

Develop Your Thematic Question

Here are some guiding questions to consider as you develop your thematic question. Reflect on these prompts to clarify your focus.

1. Brainstorm

- What issue that could lead to a big idea about the environment are you most passionate about exploring with your students?

I'm interested in helping my students understand the big picture of how everything in the environment is connected. Using systems thinking, we explore how choices—like reducing waste or conserving energy—impact entire ecosystems and even the planet's health.

- What current events or real-world examples resonate with you and can help bring environmental issues to life for your students?

Fast fashion resonates with me—it's a real-world example of how consumerism impacts waste, resources, and pollution, helping students see the environmental cost of everyday choices.

2. Prioritize

You might have more than one environmental issue you'd like to explore with your students. Now, think about which one will create the most meaningful conversations and learning.

I'm new to systems thinking, and it's definitely a lot to wrap my head around, but I'm trying to learn. My administration is supportive and interested in systems thinking, so I want to make sure my approach fits our school culture. My students already know a little about recycling and waste, so I'd shape my question around how our school can reduce waste together. Framing it as a collaborative challenge—like a “zero-waste lunch week”—could get everyone involved and make it easier to address any concerns. I'm willing to engage with this issue, but I know I'll need support and guidance as I go.

Through this brainstorming and prioritization process, write your thematic question. Some stems that might be useful are:

- How can/do . . . ?
- What might . . . ?

Write your thematic question here.

Maybe the best question might be, How does systems thinking change our world?

See page 38 in the book for more information on creating thematic questions.

Foster Your Thinking Through Commentary

First, review the following questions and respond to a few or all of them. Use a list or brainstorm freely to capture your ideas.

- Whose voices or stories do you need to hear to understand this issue, and why are they important to you?

I'd like to explore more about what happens to all of the stuff we buy. Who handles it, and where does it go? How does it affect them?

- What unfair systems or problems do you want your students to think about when learning about this issue, and how can you help them ask questions and find ways to make things better?

Many of my students are wealthy and often do not think about how money is spent or made or who might be getting less than what they deserve.

- Whose experiences or ideas are sometimes left out when this issue is talked about, and how can you share those voices in your classroom to help everyone learn more?

I'd like to find the connections to people and situations and show my students how everything is connected.

From your responses, begin to find springboards that will help you develop commentary that deepens your thematic exploration.

Springboards to Support Commentary

- Springboard 1: **General research on systems thinking**
 - Title or source: *Google search*
 - Key insights: *I found a book and some websites.*
- Springboard 2: **Simulation games**
 - Title or source: *Free eco-simulation game*
 - Key insights: *I found a game about biodiversity my students can play online, which helps with systems thinking.*
- Springboard 3: **Fast fashion**
 - Title or source: *Annie Leonard's (2010) The Story of Stuff*
 - Key insights: *This free open source tells what happens with our stuff.*

See page 40 in the book for more information on developing springboards for commentary.

PHASE 2: EMPOWER

Cultivate a List of Green Reads and Views

Consider the three cycles of comprehension as you choose your strategies: simple comprehension (retell and summarize), criteria comprehension (support thinking), and perspective comprehension (investigate explicit and implicit perspectives and move to systems thinking).

Select texts and digital media that flow from your thematic question and your commentary research. If you need help finding texts or digital media, consult go.SolutionTree.com/literacy, our companion website (www.greenliteracy.org), or your school or local librarian.

What types of texts or stories (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or multimedia) can you use to help your students connect emotionally and critically to this environmental issue? What is the author's message?

Green Reads
Title: <u>The Story of Stuff</u> by Annie Leonard (2007) Author's message: <u>Everything is connected.</u>
Title: <u>If You Give a Mouse a Cookie</u> by Laura J. Numeroff (1985) Author's message: <u>A thought experiment on feedback or causal loops (in this case, A causes B, B causes C, which eventually comes back to A)</u>
Title: <u>Trying</u> by Kobi Yamada (2020) Author's message: <u>We can learn when we fail.</u>
Title: <u>The Story of Change</u> by Annie Leonard (2012) Author's message: <u>Change must include consumer awareness and change in the economic system.</u>
Title: <u>Malala's Magic Pencil</u> by Malala Yousafzai (2017) Author's message: <u>Systems thinking</u>

Select Green Literacy Strategies

<p>What reading, writing, and drama strategies will encourage your students to express their thoughts, analyze the issue, and explore solutions?</p> <p>Reading, Writing, and Drama Strategies:</p> <p>Free-write</p> <p>PREP With Three Phases</p> <p>Journal</p>	<p>How can you support all your students—no matter their reading level or background—to engage deeply with the issue and build their understanding?</p> <p>Immersive Strategies:</p> <p>Thumb-Wrestling Game</p> <p>Simulation games</p>
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See page 45 in the book for more information on selecting Green Literacy strategies.

See page 16 in the book for more information on the three cycles of comprehension.

PHASE 3: SHIFT

Develop Green Literacy Ideals

As you work with your students to create their Green Literacy ideals, remember this is something that happens naturally during your teaching. You can plan all the other steps ahead of time, but for this last part, you'll need to pause and observe how your students respond.

Reflection 1

As you plan how to guide your students in creating their Green Literacy ideals, take a moment to think about the lessons you've already taught. How did your students respond during these activities? What really stood out to you? Write down some notes or free-write about what you noticed happening in your classroom.

I'm still learning how to guide my students, but I've noticed they engage the most when they

can make real-world connections. During a lesson on environmental impacts, they were eager to share examples from their own lives, like noticing litter in their neighborhood or changes in local parks. What stood out was their curiosity and willingness to collaborate when the topic felt relevant to them.

Reflection 2

In your free-writing, think about what stood out to you during class discussions about the books. What were some interesting things your students said about using the reading and writing strategies?

When we watched Annie Leonard's *The Story of Stuff*, it really clicked for them—they started pointing out how the things they use every day, like water bottles or fast fashion, connect to bigger environmental impacts. What stood out was their curiosity and how they wanted to talk about solutions, like reusing items or buying less. It showed me that when the topic feels personal and relevant, they're eager to learn.

See page 47 in the book for more information on how to facilitate the Green Literacy ideals discussion.

REFERENCES

Leonard, A. (2007, December). *The story of stuff* [Video file]. Free Range Studios. Accessed at www.storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff on August 23, 2024.

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Yousafzai, M. (2017). *Malala's magic pencil*. Little, Brown.