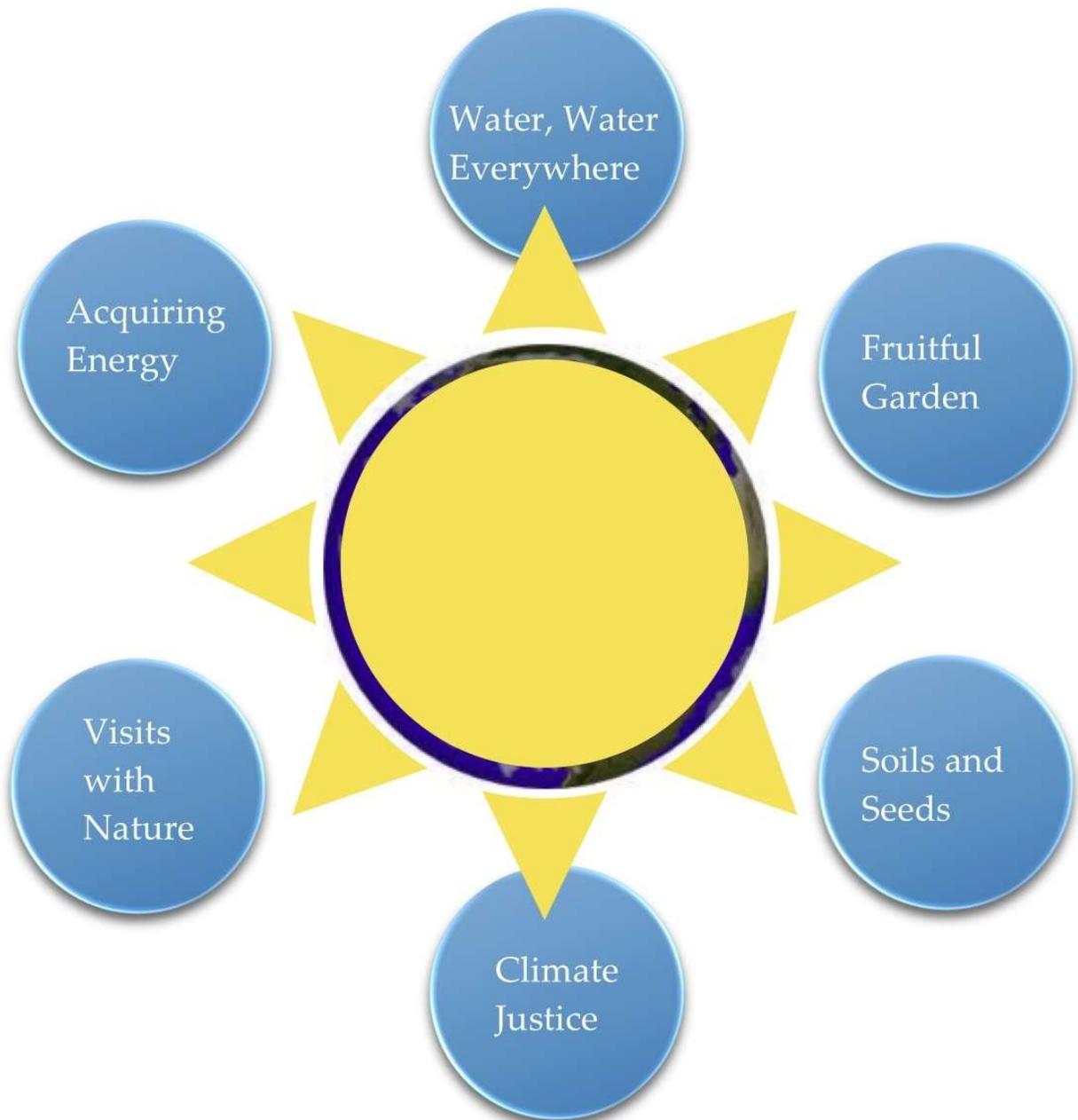




# EarthCircles

UU Environmental Justice  
5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum





# EarthCircles

## INTRODUCTION

### INTRODUCTION

“All religions, the arts, and science are branches of the same tree.”

Albert Einstein

### OVERVIEW

When Einstein spoke of the conceptual overlap among religions, the arts, and science, he echoed the long-held views of Unitarian Universalist thinkers such as the Concord philosophers of the mid-1800s. Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and others met often for Table Talk sessions. Their views on learning versus standard education are reflected in our approach to developing Earth Circles materials.

“ Observation more than books, experience rather than persons, are the prime educators.”

A. Bronson Alcott

“The senses collect the surface facts of matter – *sensation*.

When memory comes, it is *experience*.

When the mind reacts, it is *knowledge*.

When the mind acts on it as knowledge, it is *thought*.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Letters and Social Aims

Earth Circles is an exciting new Environmental Justice curriculum for UU 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade Kids. The goal is for Kids to develop both understanding of and caring for the natural world we share with all living creatures. Given that it doesn't matter what we know if we don't care, children need to learn through experiences that are meaningful to them. Such experiences promote understanding of their environment and valuing of its connection to their own lives, their community, and worldwide events. Lessons focus on connections between people, other forms of life, and the natural resources that sustain us all, and commitment to maintaining a healthy environment for all of life.

## OUR SEVEN UU PRINCIPLES:

The Earth Circles curriculum reinforces all of our Seven UU Principles. The Seventh Principle's focus is on living in harmony with nature. Other Principles are concerned with respect, self-worth, social awareness, and justice in human endeavors. A Principles in Practice discussion in each lesson helps Kids to make connections between activities and values, and consider relationships in their own lives.

1. Respect all people.
2. Treat everyone fairly and kindly.
3. We all grow by learning.
4. Grow in spirit, mind, and heart.
5. Be true to your ideals and vote on them.
6. Work for peace and justice.
7. Value our connection to all life.

### Seven UU Principles

1. Respect
2. Be Fair and Kind
3. Grow by Learning
4. Grow in Spirit, Mind and Heart
5. Be True to Ideals
6. Work for Peace and Justice
7. Value our Connections to All Life

## GOALS:

- Kids learn from experiences meaningful to them.
- Kids develop understanding and caring for the natural world we share with all living creatures.
- Kids understand the connections of natural resources to their own lives, their community, and worldwide events.
- Kids discover how different peoples worldwide depend on resources available to them and how different cultures are affected by changing climates.

## THE UNITS:

Earth Circles units include social issues as well as basic practical science and Principles in Practice. Each lesson suggests a reading, which may enrich discussion of the lesson.

**Water at Work:** Where does water come from in our own community, in our region and in other parts of the world? How do people use water? How do we take care of water?

**Visits with Nature:** Where do we find the Web of Life? Looking for clues in the outdoors – woods, parks and ponds – brings ecological concepts to life and develops feelings of connection with the natural world.

**Soils and Seeds:** What makes a healthy soil and how do worms help? How is a seed formed? How do bees help? Kids dissect flowers and use their own worm bin compost to grow plants indoors.

**The Fruitful Garden:** How is our food supply produced? What is the difference between organic farming and agribusiness? Kids grow a vegetable garden outdoors based on the Three Sisters concept of Native American gardening. They may sell their produce to the congregation and use the profit to support a food pantry or other social endeavor.

**Acquiring Energy:** Where does the energy we use come from? How do we use it? How do people across the world access it? At what cost to the environment? What can we do to reverse the global warming that results from our use of energy resources?

**Climate Change:** What causes weather and climate? Is our planet really getting warmer? Why? How is this affecting people in different parts of the world?

Each lesson includes a Principles in Practice discussion.

## A WORD ABOUT SCHEDULING

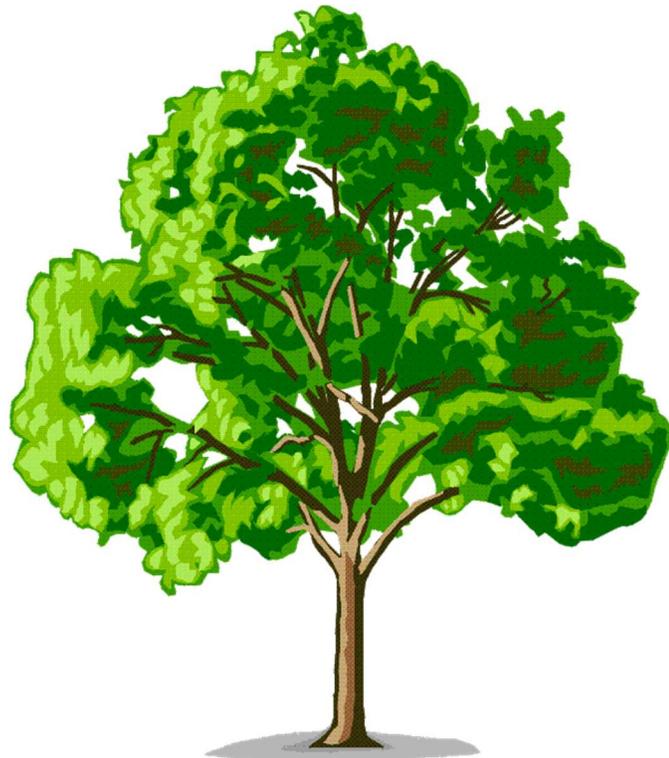
Sequencing these lessons is intended to be on a flexible schedule, depending on the needs and circumstances in your situation. Some lessons in the Soils and Seeds unit and the Fruitful Garden unit depend on seasons and local climate. These lessons could be scheduled one or two at a time determined by seedling growth and by the local growing season. Lessons in Visits with Nature are single outdoor experiences. For example, when doing Water At Work in the Fall, you could plan to do a Fall Woods Walk lesson as the leaves turn color, or visit a local pond or stream after doing the Dragonfly Pond lesson. Or you could choose to start a worm farm for a year-long project. It would take more than a year of Sundays to do all of the lessons!

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS:

- It is important for teachers to read through the lesson plan before teaching it. Background information is helpful.
- Some preparation is necessary for the activities.
- You may want to try some of them yourself before involving Kids.

Within Earth Circle's lessons we encourage you as teachers and guides to reach out to all Kids in your programs so they feel included and valued.

- Make sure that your space, lesson plans, and behaviors let each Kid know that they are welcome. Have Kids sit with you in a circle for the Opening and Closing Circles.
- Hang a UU Principles poster (Kid version) where it is visible from the circle of chairs.
- Be aware of classroom dynamics. Use a classroom covenant (promises that the Kids agree upon for their behavior) to hold them accountable for their actions.
- Make time during your first lesson to create your classroom covenant if Kids have not already done one for the year.
- Be aware of any accessibility needs of your Kids. Adapt lessons as needed to allow for a child using a wheelchair, with hearing problems, difficulty reading, etc.
- Listen to the needs of your group. If Kids are having trouble sitting still, it might be time for an "energy break" which is time to get up and move to redirect extra energy.
- For the safety of all it is necessary for two adults to be with the class every lesson.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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(The Bedford local TV station provided invaluable advice, filming and editing of video clips. Many thanks to Greg Dolan and Brian Dorrington.)

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What would have happened without the help of all these enthusiastic people!! Thank you, everyone, for helping to make environmental education a reality for religious education.

Maureen Oates and Janet Powers

