Contextualizing English Instruction to Focus on Environmental Issues

For a learning context to be authentic, it should be both personally and socially relevant. One such authentic focus for learners today is environmental preservation due to the changing state of the environment and the impact of this change on our shared future.

In this webinar, we will:

• examine teaching techniques—including chants, replacement performance role plays, and activities that involve discussing possible solutions to local issues—to contextualize language learning within local, environmental settings

• explore how to use authentic materials to connect local to global ecological concerns for learners of all ages and proficiency levels

U.S. Department of State

A E
Susan Huss-Lederman and Danielle Sclafani

Susan is Professor of English Emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Previously, she conducted a two-year ELT professional development program in Mexico, and she co-directed projects to increase the number of bilingual and ESL teachers in Wisconsin. Susan was a Fulbright scholar in Mexico and served as an English Specialist in residence in Ecuador. Currently, she leads a team of ELT educators for the Galapagos Conservancy’s Education for Sustainability Project.

Danielle has worked in ELT for over 10 years. She was a Fulbright ETA in Korea, taught English in bilingual schools in Spain, taught Business English in Chile, and has volunteered with refugee centers New York. She was recently a U.S. Department of State English Language Fellow and Specialist in Ecuador. Danielle has a master’s degree in Higher and Postsecondary Education from Columbia University Teachers College and a BA in Psychology and certificate in TESOL from Hamilton College.
Contextualizing English Instruction to Focus on Environmental Issues
Session Goals

To examine key terms and concepts related to contextualized language instruction focused on environmental issues

To demonstrate these concepts in action by exploring two adaptable ELT techniques and one innovative resource. These are:

- Jazz chants
- Replacement performance role-plays
- Environmental footprint calculators
Contextualized Language Learning: Environmental Issues

Key terms & concepts
Contextualization

Language learning reflects a situation that is **relevant** to students.

(Shaping the Way We Teach English, Module 1)
Authenticity

• Language use has a real **purpose** in a real **context**.

• Texts that are used for learning English are not just for learning English.

(Shaping the Way We Teach English, Module 1)
What are the benefits of using authentic materials and contexts in the English language classroom?
Why Use Authentic Materials and Contexts in English Class?

1. Communicate meaning and information – produced for real communication rather than to teach language. (Thomas, 2014)

2. Bring a fresh perspective and new ideas into the classroom.

3. Help foster connections to other subject-areas (great for CBI, CLIL, PBL teachers).

4. Often free and very easy to find online or in certain locations in your communities.

(AE Teacher’s Corner)
“By integrating environmental education into the language classroom, educators can

(1) heighten students’ interest in contemporary issues that might directly influence their futures;

(2) teach students how to contribute to a healthier, more sustainable world; and

(3) promote language learning and meaningful communication.”

(Hauschild, Poltavtchenko, & Stoller, 2012)
What do you think of ...?

sustainability

environment

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Knowing Our Terms

**Sustainability -**
Living within **planetary boundaries**

(Raworth, 2017)

**Environmental Education -**
Learning to **improve our behavior** in the environment

(US EPA, 2021)
What is an important sustainability issue for you?
Which sustainability topics might be interesting to address in your classes?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Classroom Techniques

1. Jazz Chants
Jazz Chants - Purpose:
Practice natural rhythm of spoken English

Carolyn Graham noticed that English’s rhythm is reflected in the rhythm of American jazz.
Jazz Chants: Advantages

Practical for the teacher

• adaptable to different ages and English proficiency levels
• simple to prepare
• easy to contextualize
• reflect vocabulary, phrases, and grammar points the class is working on
• can be used at different lesson stages, warm-up, vocabulary focus, review, transition
• work well in any class size
Jazz Chants: Advantages

Engaging for the students

• comfort practicing pronunciation in groups
• can be prepared by students
• can be chanted in storytelling

Fun way to develop metalinguistic awareness
(thinking about language structure)
Chants use familiar vocabulary.
Step 1: Prepare the chant. Choose the topic, vocabulary, and phrases.

Use familiar vocabulary OR only a few new words.

We’re in it together! Together, make a cleaner world!
Linking sounds between words—

We’re in it together!

sounds like:

Weer-rin-nih-together!
Step 2: Present the vocabulary and phrases to the students.

Use the words OR pictures or both.

We’re in it together!
Together, make a cleaner world!
Step 3: Tap the beat.
Step 4: Tap the beat and perform the chant.

We’re In It Together!

Keep the beach clean! (clap)

Keep the city clean! (clap)

Keep the earth clean! (clap)

Together make a cleaner world!
Let’s try a change!

Keep the ___________ green! (clap)

We’re in it together.

Keep the ___________ green! (clap)

We’re in it together.

Keep the ___________ green! (clap)

We’re in it together.

Together, make a greener world!
What places would you like to keep green?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Keep It Green!

Keep the ___________ green! (clap)

We’re in it together.

Keep the ___________ green! (clap)

We’re in it together.

Keep the ___________ green! (clap)

We’re in it together.

Together, make a greener world!
Vocabulary Chants

• Pronounce related vocabulary words
• Emphasis on syllable stress
• Each word has one syllable with strong stress.

** A link to a short video of Carolyn Graham explaining how to create vocabulary chants will be available on the AE Live Webinar Resource Center. **
Vocabulary Chants
Step 1: Choose a topic.

Animals of the
Galapagos Islands of Ecuador
Step 2: List three vocabulary words from the topic on the board.

You can draw pictures, too!

turtle
penguin
shark
Step 3: Create the chant.

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)
Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)
Turtle, penguin
Turtle, penguin
Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)
Step 4: Perform the chant

1. Tap the clap.
2. Tap the beat with the chant.

Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)
Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)
Turtle, penguin
Turtle, penguin
Turtle, penguin, shark (clap)
Let’s try it!

Respecting animals is an important environmental topic. List three animals we should protect.
Let’s try it!

Leopard, wolf, rhino! (clap)
Leopard, wolf, rhino! (clap)
Leopard, wolf!
Leopard, wolf!
Leopard, wolf, rhino! (clap)
Let’s make our own!

What animals should we protect?
• Suggest an animal!
• You can suggest more than one!

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Extension: Syllable Challenge!

1. Ask students to list vocabulary words.
2. Organize words by syllables with the students in columns.
3. Use words from the chart to make a chant to follow a syllable pattern: for example, 2 - 1 - 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wolf</td>
<td>leopard</td>
<td>pelican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shark</td>
<td>rhino</td>
<td>octopus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>squid</td>
<td>monkey</td>
<td>elephant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Involve the students!

1. Brainstorm a vocabulary list with students related to the environmental topic.
2. Write the vocabulary words on cards or the board.
3. Practice pronunciation of words.
4. Organize the words by number of syllables.
5. Create a chant.
How could you change your voice or use actions to practice vocabulary chants with your students?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Ideas for Practice
Vocabulary Chants

1. Practice the **rhythm** by clapping or tapping.
2. Practice the **chant** by clapping or tapping.
3. **Play with voice**
   a. change pitch (high-low)
   b. volume (loud-quiet)
   c. speed (fast-slow)
4. **Play with chant**
   a. assign groups lines
   b. incorporate gestures & actions
   c. include in storytelling
   d. use picture cues
   e. ask students to create chants
Standing Up for Nature

We can use English to speak up in difficult situations.

It is rare to see in textbooks,
BUT
it is important for environmental protection!
Classroom Techniques

2. Replacement Performance Role-Play
When you use role-plays with your students, what topics or situations do you use?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Replacement Performance Role-Play
Maria Snarski

Purpose: To engage students in **authentic, problem-solving**

Proficiency: High-beginner to advanced

Skills: Writing and speaking

(Snarski, 2007)
Replacement Performance Role-Play

Respond
Rehearse
Replace
Reflect
Steps

1. The teacher proposes an unresolved problem for specific roles.
Scenario: Problem at the Beach

Roles:
- Local residents 1 and 2; they are friends.
- Tourist visiting a beach

Do not feed the animals.
How would you respond to the tourist’s actions?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Steps

2. Put students in groups (ideally, reflecting the number of roles), students collaborate in groups to write skits that resolve the problem.

[RESPOND]

3. Groups **rehearse** their own skit.

[REHEARSE]

4. A volunteer group (Group 1) **performs** their skit.
Steps

5. The class discusses the resolution of the problem in the skit. [RESPOND] Perhaps another group (Group 2) has solved the problem differently and wants to share.

6. A member from Group 2 performs the changed role in the Group 1 skit. This changes the dynamic and the outcome. [REPLACE]
Steps

7. The class reflects on the changing situation. [REFLECT]

8. Other students in the class can coach the actors on what to do next.

** Find detailed steps for this activity in Maria Snarski’s *English Teaching Forum* article, on the AE Live Webinar Resource Center. **
What do you think?

What are some advantages of using replacement performance role-plays to practice speaking?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Advantages of Replacement Performance Role-Play

1. **Practical** for the teacher  
   a. simple to prepare  
   b. easy to contextualize  
   c. flexible: can use picture cues or prepared scenario related to real life situations  

2. **Engaging** for the students  
   a. develop student agency  
   b. situations reflect many different experiences  
   c. responses vary, keeping the activity fresh
Variation Ideas

• Students can suggest situations from personal experience, news, or fiction.

• Roles can be professional. For example, students could take on the role of rangers, naturalist guides, or environmental scientists.

• Teachers can suggest politeness phrases for students to practice.

• Students can record their skits and post videos to share online. Teachers can lead an online reflection.
Classroom Resource

3. Environmental Footprint Calculators
Environmental Footprint

What do you think of when you hear the phrase, *environmental footprint*?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Environmental Footprint

the effect that people have on the environment through their lifestyle and actions
Have you ever used an environmental footprint calculator?
Environmental Footprint Calculators

Tools that show users how their lifestyle affects our planet.

A bigger environmental footprint means you are having a more negative impact on the planet.

Free

Online or Offline

Based on environmental research data
How To: Environmental Footprint Calculators

How to find:
1. Find online calculators via a website
2. Download and print premade paper-based calculators from online sources
3. Teachers can create their own calculator to use with their students.

How to use:
1. Individually
2. In groups
3. With the whole class
4. Online, on paper or blackboard
5. At home, school, or on a field trip
Calculating Environmental Footprints

1. Fashion Footprint Calculator
2. “Unpacking your Lunch” Quiz
3. Classroom Trash Tracker
1. Fashion Footprint Calculator

Online @ thredup.com/fashion footprint

Individual activity at home or in school!

DID YOU KNOW?
New apparel production releases 4M tons of harmful carbon emissions annually, contributing more than 8% of global greenhouse emissions. The single best thing we can do for the planet is consume less and reuse more.
1. Fashion Footprint Calculator

Best for ages 13+ and high-beginner to advanced students
1. Fashion Footprint Calculator Tips

Teachers can **model** the activity or provide **guidance** and **scaffolding**

1. **Model** how to fill out the calculator
2. **Pre-teach** or review new vocabulary for increased comprehension.
3. **Follow up** with a discussion or extension activity

| Vocabulary List
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondhand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Fashion Footprint Calculator Extension

Write a reflective journal entry about your fashion footprint.

1. How do you feel about your fashion footprint?
2. What did you learn from your results?
3. What changes can you make to reduce your footprint?

My fashion footprint makes me feel ___________.

2. Unpacking Your Lunch

An activity for students to calculate the sustainability of their lunch using a short quiz.

(Quiz and activity from: www.earthrangers.org)
Let’s Give it A Try!

1. Think about your last meal (breakfast, lunch, or dinner). How many pieces of trash did your meal produce? 
   a. None!
   b. Only one
   c. Two or more pieces
2. Where did the food in your meal come from?

a. I didn’t buy anything – I grew all the food in my backyard garden or farm!

b. I bought it from a local shop or market that is walking distance from my home.

c. It came from far away–I had to go by car to purchase my food at a large supermarket.
3. How much meat was in your meal?
   
   a. None at all!
   
   b. There was some meat like chicken or turkey, but no beef.
   
   c. It included beef.
Calculate your score...

a. = 1 point
b. = 2 points
c. = 3 points

The higher your score, the bigger your environmental footprint (based on your last meal!)
Discuss and Reflect

How did the quiz make you feel?
Were you surprised by your score?
2. Unpacking Your Lunch

Always support your students ...

Be sure to follow up with a discussion and/or extension activity and help them brainstorm solutions.
What is an extension or follow-up activity you could do with students after they “unpack” their lunch?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
Extension: How Can I Reduce My Footprint?

An activity that encourages self-reflection & promotes a positive outlook

Instructions:

1. **Together, brainstorm** what contributes to a larger footprint (e.g., showering too long, driving long distances, etc).
2. Using a pencil, students **trace their foot** on a piece of paper or poster.
3. **They list** eco-friendly **ways they can reduce** their footprint.
4. Teachers can **hang** footprints in the classroom.
3. Trash Tracker

An activity for students to calculate the sustainability of their lifestyle by tracking pieces of trash in a graphic organizer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Trash</th>
<th>How Many?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (describe)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trash Tracker: How-to Tips

1. Offline
2. High-beginner to advanced
3. Alone, groups, or as a whole class
4. Students count pieces of trash from their lunch/snack, or even trash they find on the playground.
5. Students record the amount of trash during one day, week, or month.
6. The class can set a goal to reduce the amount of trash produced.
7. Results and goals can be displayed in the classroom or school.
Trash Tracker Extension Activity

What’s an extension or follow-up activity that you could do in your classroom?
Whole Class Extension Activity

1. As a class, brainstorm ways to lessen the classroom environmental footprint.

2. Make a classroom pledge to reduce your classroom footprint and have all students sign it.

3. Assign classroom monitors or helpers for different environmental tasks like watering the plants or turning off the lights.

A Pledge for a Greener Classroom

1. Recycle and reuse
2. Share with others
3. Turn off lights and close windows
4. Care for our classroom plants
5. Use a water bottle
6. Educate others!
Tips for Incorporating Environmental Topics In Your English Classes

1. Keep age, level, and context in mind.
2. Visuals are key!
3. Model, guide, and scaffold (e.g., pre-teach new vocab).
4. Follow up with a discussion or extension activity.
Benefits of Incorporating Environmental Topics into English Classes

• Simple and fun
• Helps students develop awareness about a contemporary issue
• Encourages self-reflection
• Supports development of a “can do” attitude
• Supports development of critical thinking and meaningful communication skills in English
Let’s Reflect

What can you do in your classroom to incorporate environmental issues into English language teaching?

Share your ideas in the chat or comments.
As teachers, we can

• Teach English for environmental responsibility
• Incorporate local, environmental topics
• Help our students to be change-makers
Change is our challenge.

“When enough people come together, then change will come and we can achieve almost anything. So instead of looking for hope — start creating it.”

— Greta Thunberg
Swedish teenager and environmental activist
References and Resources


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Continued

  https://seagrant.psu.edu/sites/default/files/Lessons%20for%20NIE%202%20and%203%205GyresALLACTIVITIESPlasticPollutionCurriculum.pdf
  https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/50_2_3_hauschild-et-al.pdf
  https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(17)30028-1
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2021, August 18). *What is environmental education?*

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Thank you!

Questions or concerns?
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Reflection Questions

1. How might you incorporate environmental conservation topics into existing curriculum areas? What kind of units, projects, or activities might you add or adapt?

2. How might you include jazz chants in your ELT practice, whether focusing on environmental topics or other content and language areas?

3. What extension or variation ideas did the techniques in today’s webinar inspire? How might you extend or modify the demonstrated approaches to best suit the needs of your learners?