

Youth Leadership

Eco-Stewardship Project

青年领导力

环境守护计划

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Abstract

This project-based learning unit challenges students to investigate the "hidden costs" of modern lifestyles, examining the intersection of environmental health and global equity. Through research into four critical areas—soil integrity, fast fashion, energy consumption, and city development—students deconstruct traditional definitions of "progress." The curriculum integrates scientific inquiry with Chinese language arts, tasking students to synthesize their findings into original, illustrated digital storybooks. By personifying environmental crises and proposing actionable solutions, students transition from passive consumers to global advocates.

Keywords

Hidden costs, ecological stewardship, global equity, youth-created stories

Overview

This Project-Based Learning (PBL) unit invites Eastview High School 12th grade Chinese level 5 students to peel back the layers of modern convenience to uncover the "hidden costs" of our global lifestyle. This unit happened at the end of the 12th grade school year. By asking how we can redefine "progress" to prioritize the Earth's health and global equity, students engaged in an interdisciplinary journey that blends environmental science, social ethics, and Chinese linguistic artistry. The goals included:

- students can identify how modern values (like speed, convenience, progress, and consumption) shape our choices and our relationship with nature;
- students can research and analyze the environmental 'hidden costs' of my daily habits and industry practices;
- students can propose actionable solutions at both the individual and systemic levels to promote environmental stewardship;
- students can lead a mini workshop with a persuasive story in Mandarin Chinese using topic-specific vocabulary to advocate for a more sustainable lifestyle.

Students were organized into specialized research collectives focusing on four critical aspects of modern impact: soil integrity, fast fashion, energy consumption, and city design and waste management. The process moved from academic inquiry to creative synthesis; students didn't just report facts—they transformed their data into compelling Chinese-language storybooks. Inspired by the text "The Magic Hole" and the example story *Cry for a Lemur*, students used narrative to personify environmental crises and articulate a moral imperative for change. Students also came up with actionable suggestions in the story book.

The unit emphasized authentic audience engagement. Beyond the classroom, students utilized digital tools like Canva to produce visuals, and their work was presented to younger Chinese language learners and at an educational symposium. This final stage shifted the student's role from learner to advocate.

Framing

We live in an era of unprecedented convenience, where a click brings a new outfit to our door and a swipe power our global connections. But beneath this surface of "progress" lies an invisible thread connecting our daily choices to distant landscapes. Every cheap garment, every discarded device, and every meal carry a silent history of depleted soil, exhausted energy, and mounting waste.

In this project, students became investigators of the unseen. By unmasking these hidden costs, we shifted our perspective from passive consumers to Earth’s protectors. We didn't just study the crisis; we found its heartbeat through storytelling. Through the power of the language learning process, we wove research into narratives that challenged the world to look deeper, listen closer, and finally redefine what it truly means for a civilization to move forward.

At a Glance

Title	Youth Leadership: Eco-Stewardship Project 青年领导力：环境守护计划
Unit Time	4/15/2026 - 5/8/2026
Grade Level(s)	12th grade Chinese level 5
Core Texts	• “The Magic Hole” (teacher-adapted). This story introduces the central concept of consequences and the illusion that waste simply “disappears.” • <i>Cry for a Lemur</i> (teacher-authored). A direct example of how to blend research with emotive Chinese storytelling. • “Diary of a Worm” (《蚯蚓的日记》). A mentor text showing how to use a non-human character to reveal the hidden health of the Earth.
Supporting Texts	• Guest lecture from local Chinese environmental organizations, Ziran, provided primary-source evidence of local ecological action. • Group 1 (Food & Soil): “The Real Cost of an Apple” (Article). Students analyzed the price gap between supermarket convenience and ecological reality. • Group 2 (Fast Fashion): “The True Cost” (Documentary). Provided the visual and ethical evidence of the global supply chain's impact on people and water. • Group 3 (Digital/AI): “Google’s Nuclear Plants for AI” & “Teen AI Chatbot Usage” (Media). These texts challenged students to look at the physical

	and emotional energy required to power our digital "magic." Group 4 (Waste/Landfill): "The Story of Plastic" & "From Landfill to Landmark" (Video/Local Site). These resources contrasted the "out of sight" reality of landfills with the hope of community restoration at sites like Wakaŋ Tipi.
Climate Literacy Terms	Pesticides, organic farming, ecosystem, pollution, sustainability, fossil fuels, climate change, misinformation, environmental justice, landfill, conservation, consumption, waste management
Objectives	- I can identify how modern values (like speed, convenience, progress, and consumption) shape our choices and our relationship with nature. - I can research and analyze the environmental 'hidden costs' of my daily habits and industry practices. - I can propose actionable solutions at both the individual and systemic levels to promote environmental stewardship. - I can lead a mini workshop with a persuasive story in Mandarin using topic-specific vocabulary to advocate for a more sustainable lifestyle.
Materials and Resources	Project main slides Hook lesson: How to live a sustainable life? Guest speaker organization: Ziran Teacher adapted story: The Magic Hole Teacher authored story: Cry for a lemur Student handout (graphic organizer to organize research) Student-created books (Appendix 1)

Going Forward

Moving forward, this project serves as a launchpad for lifelong ecological citizenship. By synthesizing complex global data into relatable Chinese narratives, students have bridged the gap between awareness and advocacy. The journey does not end with the final page of their storybooks; rather, it continues as they share their work with the community, sparking dialogue and inspiring younger learners to question the status quo.

Equipped with a new vocabulary of climate literacy and a redefined understanding of progress, I hope these students are prepared to navigate the 21st century not just as consumers, but as mindful stewards of a shared future.

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Appendix 1: Students' Books

Group 1: [*Andy and the Organic Tomato*](#)

Description: Andy and Wally are two ants who happily live together in a garden and love eating tomatoes every day. One day, humans spray pesticides on the garden crops, causing Wally to become very sick. Wanting to help his best friend, Andy searches for medicine and meets a farmer who grows organic vegetables without harmful chemicals. The farmer explains that pesticides can hurt not only insects, but also forests, animals, and people. Andy brings back an organic tomato, which helps Wally recover, and the two friends decide to move to the organic farm where food is safer for everyone.

Group 2: [*The Hidden Cost*](#)

Description: The Hidden Cost follows AnBeiJun, a girl who loves buying cheap, cute clothes online and initially ignores warnings about the problems caused by fast fashion. During a family trip to Myanmar, she unexpectedly discovers a clothing factory and witnesses workers laboring in harsh and miserable conditions. Seeing the human cost behind the inexpensive clothes she enjoys changes her understanding of fast fashion.

When AnBeiJun returns home, she stops buying fast fashion and becomes an advocate for sustainable fashion. Five years later, she becomes a government representative herself and speaks out against fast fashion. In the audience is another girl looking at her phone—just as AnBeiJun once did—but this time, the girl puts down her phone and listens.

Group 3: *Good Monsters, Bad Monsters*

Description: A young boy grows up hearing terrifying stories his oil teacher teaches him about dangerous water monsters. Because of these lessons, he becomes afraid of the water monsters. One day, lost in the forest, the young boy is rescued by a water monster. As he spends time with water monsters, he realizes they are kind, peaceful, and misunderstood. However, the true danger soon appears when a violent oil monster attacks and destroys the good monsters. The boy tries to warn the people that the oil monster—not the water monsters—is the real threat. At first no one believes him, but after seeing the truth themselves, the people unite to defeat the oil monster and finally embrace the monsters they once feared.

The story's moral is that people can be taught to fear the wrong things. The boy feared water, yet water saved him, while people trusted and depended on oil even though oil was the true monster. It encourages readers to question fear, challenge misinformation, and recognize that what seems unfamiliar is not always dangerous.

Group 4: [A Home for Everyone](#)

Description: This story is about a peaceful forest where turtles lived happily with clean water, fresh air, and beautiful green trees. One day, wolves from far away arrived and slowly changed the forest by cutting down trees, building cities, and leaving behind trash and pollution. As more waste piled up, parts of the forest began to look like a landfill, filled with garbage instead of life. The animals lost their homes, and the turtles became very sad. But with the help of wise eagles and the other animals, the forest was cleaned and restored. Together, they learned an important lesson: nature is everyone's home, and it must be protected with care and respect.