



## Philosophy Lesson Plan

**Title of Lesson:** Environmental Ethics and the Real World

**Course:** Philosophy 29: Ethics and the Environment

### Student Learning Goals:

1. Reinforce students' conceptual understanding of environmental ethics perspectives.
2. Apply environmental ethics frameworks to assess complex current events.
3. Encourage students to clarify own values and incorporate environmental ethics into everyday decision-making.

### Activity 1: Environmental Figures

The [Environmental Activists, Heroes, and Martyrs](#) page provides a working list of seminal environmental figures ranging from the 20th century American thinkers to modern day indigenous activists. Not only does this assignment provide an opportunity to apply ethical perspectives to real environmental activists and issues, but it also inspires students with positive examples of environmental action and engagement. This module can be incorporated into the course as a small group discussion and brief presentation or a take-home reflection.

- Small Group Work (30 minutes)
  - Divide the class into small teams of three. Each group will each choose one environmental figure, read the associated profile, and discuss the following questions for 5-10 minutes. Teams will orally present to the rest of the class for 3 minutes, with each individual summarizing the answer to one question.
  - Discussion Questions
    - What environmental issue(s) does the individual address?
    - Which ethical perspectives discussed in class appear to motivate this person's actions?
    - How would another ethical perspective inform a different approach to this environmental issue?
- Take-home Reflection
  - Engage students with a 1-2 page reflection as a homework or extra credit assignment.
  - Reflection Questions
    - What environmental issue(s) does the individual address?
    - Which ethical perspectives discussed in class appear to motivate this person's actions?
    - How would another ethical perspective inform a different approach to this environmental issue?
    - Out of the ethical perspectives discussed in class, which one aligns best with your approach to this environmental issue?

## Activity 2: Spotted Owl Case Study

The spotted owl [case study](#) and [video](#) illustrate the interaction and potential conflict between various ethical frameworks, such as animal rights, utilitarianism, and ecocentrism. This module also encourages independent thinking, as students will practice recognizing and articulating the role of different ethical perspectives in complex examples. Potential interactive activities for this case study include a large group discussion and/or debate.

- Class Discussion (30 minutes)
  - Assign the [case study](#) for homework. Have students focus on the following questions:
    - List all of the ethical perspectives discussed in class that emerge in this case study article.
    - Describe any new ethical perspectives highlighted in the article.
  - The following class period, show the National Geographic video [“Killing One Owl to Save Another Owl?”](#) and have students take notes on the following questions:
    - List all of the ethical perspectives discussed in class that emerge in this case study video.
    - Which, if any, ethical perspectives seem to be in conflict?
  - Have students take out their notes from the homework reading, and prompt students using any of the following discussion questions:
    - Which ethical perspectives discussed in class are especially prominent in the reading and video?
    - Are there any new ethical perspectives highlighted in the article or video?
    - Are there any ethical perspectives that seem to be in conflict? Why?
    - How do utilitarianism and the rights approach appear in the video?
      - How would a utilitarian approach address the spotted owl controversy?
      - How would a rights approach address the spotted owl controversy?
    - How does ecocentrism and animal rights emerge in the spotted owl debate?
- Debate (30 minutes)
  - Divide the class into two groups. Assign the spotted owl [case study](#) and [video](#) for homework. Each group will come prepared to the following class with an opening statement, rebuttals, questions, and a concluding statement. One team will utilize the utilitarian approach while the other will leverage the rights approach to argue that their perspective fosters the most ethical solution to the spotted owl controversy. Even if both teams decide on the same outcome (e.g. to protect the spotted owl), they must argue why their ethical approach is more justified. You may use the following questions to guide each team:
  - Team 1: Utilitarianism
    - How does a utilitarian approach support protecting the spotted owl?
      - How does a utilitarian approach address the dilemma posed in the video: “killing one owl to save another owl.”
    - How does a utilitarian approach support maintaining the timber industry?
    - How does a utilitarian approach address these competing interests?
    - Why is utilitarianism a more ethical approach for the spotted owl controversy?
  - Team 2: Rights Approach
    - How does a rights approach support protecting the spotted owl?

- How does a rights approach address the dilemma posed in the video: “killing one owl to save another owl.”
- How does a rights approach support maintaining the timber industry?
- How does a rights approach address these competing interests?
- Why is the rights perspective a more ethical approach for the spotted owl controversy?

### Activity 3: Environmental Ethics at SCU

This module will challenge students to examine the role of environmental ethics in their everyday life and clarify their personal approach to ethical decision-making on campus. After researching carbon neutrality, pollution, or waste, students leverage independent thinking and creativity to present their findings in a video, podcast, or other medium.

- Team Projects
  - Begin engaging students in their environmental impact on campus by assigning the [Carbon Footprint Calculator](#) activity for homework.
  - Have students form teams of 4-5. Each team will choose one of the following topics and introductory article:
    - Carbon Offsets: [The Ethics of Carbon Offsets: An exploration of SCU’s commitment to carbon neutrality](#)
    - Transportation Emissions: [SCU Air Travel Emits Millions of Pounds of Pollution: What is our role in reducing it?](#)
    - Waste: [How Much Greenhouse Gas Does SCU Emit Due to Waste?](#)
    - Sustainable Architecture: [The Commons on Kennedy Mall: A Case Study in Green Building](#)
  - Student teams will build upon the introductory article and conduct additional research on their topic. Each group will work closely with the professor to establish the expectations and scope of work for their project. Depending on the course, this project can span a few classes or culminate after several weeks. Students are encouraged to present their ethical analysis in a creative medium, such as a podcast or video.
  - Starting Questions
    - What is the environmental issue presented in this article?
    - Which ethical perspectives are used in the article to justify a particular outcome?
    - Use 3 ethical approaches discussed in class to recommend a specific course of action for the SCU community in regards to this issue.

### Resources:

- [Environmental Activists, Heroes, and Martyrs](#)
- [Environmental Ethics Articles](#)
- [Short Course in Environmental Ethics](#)