



Open-Sky  
School

Category  
PHILOSOPHY  
FOR KIDS



Activity

# Guardians of Nature

## MATERIALS

Optional: Portable board for taking notes during the outdoor activity

## DURATION

40 MINUTES

## Activity Summary

Children's philosophy workshops aim to develop children's ability to think by and for themselves, as well as to introduce them to take a critical look at certain behaviours and social issues.

The aim of this activity is to get students to think about and discuss the theme of nature and their views on nature's place in their lives.

## Preparation

- In order to tell the story to students, read:
  - *Change-Maker: The Whanganui River* <https://natlib.govt.nz/he-tohu/learning/social-inquiry-resources/cultural-interaction/cultural-interaction-supporting-activities-and-resources/change-maker-whanganui-river>
  - *New Zealand River Granted Same Legal Rights as Human Being* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being>
- Understand what "legal person" and "legal guardian" mean under the law, so that you can answer students' questions on this subject, if necessary.
- Choose a quiet spot in nature where students can sit comfortably in a circle.



# Steps

This workshop consists of a group discussion in which students sit in a circle and share their ideas without being forced to express themselves. Every idea is valid and can lead to new avenues of thought.

Be prepared to ask questions to stimulate discussion, if necessary.

If you notice that the same students often speak at the expense of others, you can limit the number of times each student speaks. For example, you can ask students to find 3 sticks, leaves, rocks or other objects on the ground, and put one object in the center of the circle each time they take a turn to speak, until they do not have any objects left. At that point, the student can continue to listen to what their peers have to say.

## A. Say:

Let me tell you a story.

In New Zealand, an indigenous community, the Whanganui, lived before the arrival of European colonizers for hundreds of years near a river that is also called Whanganui.

For the Whanganui, nature is more than the source of their food. They regard natural elements, such as animals, plants and even waterways as brothers/sisters, equals, with whom they share planet Earth.

**They say:** "I am the river and the river is me."

## Questions

1. Do you know where New Zealand is? (If students don't know, offer to do some research when they return to class)
2. What is an indigenous community?
3. How do you see your place in nature?

## B. Let's continue the story...

In 2017, the Whanganui community was named the "legal guardian" of the Whanganui River because the New Zealand government decreed by law that the Whanganui River is a legal entity, like a business or company, with rights and duties.

The government thus respected the Whanganui conception of nature by giving the river legal status.

This law protects the river from actions that could pollute or destroy it, as the river's representatives, the Whanganui, can take legal action against people or companies that damage the river or harm its physical well-being.

1. What does it mean to be someone's or something's *legal guardian*?
2. In your opinion, does nature have legal rights like a person or a company?
3. Is mistreating nature comparable to mistreating a person?
4. What do you mean by mistreating nature?
5. Can we make use of nature's resources?

RETURN  
TO GROUP

1. What do you think about the history of the Whanganui River?
2. Can you tell the story in your own words to friends or relatives?
3. What do you think about the way the Whanganui people perceive nature?
4. Do we own nature?
5. How do you feel about nature and the environment?

### REINVESTMENT:

- Name actions, regulations or laws in the neighborhood or city that are good for nature and the environment.
- Is being respectful of others a gesture of respect for nature?
- If you wish, you can ask your students to reflect on the following question and combine this reflection with a written activity: Do we own nature? Or, are we in control of nature?