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## GREATEST IMPACT

**Grades:** 9 and up

**Time:** Several weeks to a month, depending upon the detail, research, and involvement of the students

**Materials:** Black/white board and chalk/markers; books, periodicals, Internet access

**Relevant Subjects:** Social Studies, Language Arts, Science, History, and, with modifications, Mathematics

1. Explain that students will be analyzing behaviors and product choices to determine which choices have the biggest impact on the environment, on human health and well-being, and on other species.
2. Write the following personal choices on the board:
  - a) Using a highly fuel efficient car that gets 65 miles per gallon of gas (23 km/liter), or using an SUV that gets 15 miles per gallon (5 km/liter).
  - b) Eating a completely vegetarian, whole foods, organic diet, or eating the typical American diet (non-organic, processed and packaged, including regular meals at fast food restaurants).
  - c) Buying primarily what you need, usually from second-hand shops or yard sales, or buying approximately twenty new items per week (made with various materials, including petroleum products, wood products, agricultural products, and metal products) that are wants as opposed to needs.
  - d) Recycling all paper, plastic, glass and metal, or disposing of these in the trash.
  - e) Avoiding all disposable and over-packaged products, or purchasing products without regard to their packaging and lifespan.
  - f) Any other lifestyle and product choices you think of that people make regularly.
3. Divide students into groups, with each group attempting to determine the impact of a single choice. Students can assess the impact of these choices by reading books (*Ecological Footprint* by Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees is a very useful resource for this purpose), conducting interviews, doing Internet research, etc., and then by writing down the impacts of this choice on the environment, human health, and other species.
4. Have each group report on the impact of their choice in class.

5. Have students assess which choices have the greatest positive and negative impacts and have them rank the choices in order of their greatest positive effect.

6. Lead a discussion about which choices are easiest and most difficult to make; which choices can be made independently and which require the cooperation of others (family, schools, community, businesses); which choices can be made by degrees and which have long-term consequences (e.g., one can choose more plant-based foods by degrees, while the choice of a vehicle has long-lasting effects that can't be undone by a different choice the next day).

7. Given the students' research and reporting, have them discuss which choices they will likely make.

### **Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education***