WHY ARE WE HERE?

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PURPOSE
What is our purpose here on Earth? What can we do about the problems of the world? The activity uses two short films and discussion to help students explore these important issues.

GRADES
4-10

TIME
30-45 minutes

MATERIALS
• computer, data projector & internet connection

SUBJECT AREAS
Language Arts, Science and Social Studies/History

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Common Core for grades 4-6: http://bit.ly/HaY0Am

Common Core for grades 7-10: http://bit.ly/19X4TLy
PREPARATION

Have students’ chairs arranged in a U formation with you at the open end of the U.

PROCEDURE

1. Ask students to take a couple of minutes to think about how they would respond to the following question:

   “Why are WE humans here on Earth?”

   Assure them that there is no right or wrong answer and that all answers/perspectives will be accepted and honored. Depending on the age of the students, ground rules might need to be in place prior to this discussion.

2. Invite students to share their thoughts, using the WHIP method (students start at one end of the “U” and go quickly to the other end, understanding that they can “pass” if they don’t choose to share). Avoid sharing your own views on this question so that you don’t influence the students’ thinking.

and then ask students to respond to the viewpoints presented in the PSA. Ask them to respond to the narrator’s question: “Could life on this planet survive without us?”

4. After having students share their thoughts about the PSA and its viewpoints, ask students to think about what kinds of problems we face today on this planet (this is especially important if you find that some students think that the plants and animals on Earth could not survive without the human species). Ask students to each name one problem, again using the WHIP method. (Examples might include crime, war, poverty, global warming, species extinction, animal cruelty, slavery, etc., although some students might mention “natural disasters,” such as tsunamis, earthquakes, etc.)

5. Ask students “Who has caused the majority of problems which exist today on Earth?” (Humans.) “Who did the narrator in the film say has the power to protect the entire planet and all species, including ourselves?” (Us/humans.)

6. Lead a brief discussion about how, although some of these problems seem overwhelming, we all have the power to do something positive. Show the 90-second PSA, “The Power of One”. (http://bit.ly/YBEljV) Be ready to discuss the issues presented in the film: school desegregation, the fall of the Berlin wall, Tiananmen Square, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, seal hunting, etc.

7. Ask students to take a moment to reflect and think about one person they know in their own lives who has made a difference, and then invite students to share their thoughts.

8. Ask students to choose one of the problems of the world named earlier and to think of something they can do in their own lives to help solve that problem. (You may wish to do this in small groups. Depending on the age of your students, you may want to help them brainstorm.) Set regular times for the class to report back to each other on their progress.