

“Sisters On The Planet” Class Discussion Guide

To Teachers: Climate change is an urgent issue that has widespread political, economic, and military implications. A diverse group of policy makers, religious leaders, and environmental organizations from across the ideological spectrum are coming together to focus attention on climate change and urge action at the local and national level. As part of these efforts, the American Values Network is providing materials to teachers so that they can help their students learn about this important issue.

This topic lends itself well to the classroom as a well rounded education seeks to help students engage world affairs, and few other issues have such broad and intertwining global and domestic implications as climate change does...and of all Americans, today's children will see their lives most affected by climate change.

A half-hour long video, “Sisters on the Planet,” which this guide centers on, highlights the impact climate change is having on the poorest populations in the U.S. and abroad. By dedicating a portion of your class time to showing all or part of this video, you can introduce your students to one of the most urgent issues their generation will face and help them find ways to get involved.

AVN will be having several community service projects in the spring centering on climate change, from weatherizing homes, to cleaning up riverbeds. For students interested in this topic, these would be a great way for them to take action locally. Also, in early 2010, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will be hosting a tele-town hall to discuss the moral and national security implications of climate change during school hours. As a class, you can call in and listen to one of our nation's most prominent leaders talk about this issue, and even have your students ask him a question.

So what do you need to do? Once you've decided to show this video to your class, email rjohnson@americanvaluesnetwork.org with your name, school, address, and the date of your class discussion. We will send you a copy of the DVD. At the end of your discussion, your students will most likely be looking for opportunities to “do something” on this issue. Along with the DVD, we will send you a sign-up sheet where they can indicate if they are interested in participating in any of our service projects. Another possibility is for their parents to have a “house party” in which they offer their own showing of the video, followed by discussion in a social setting. Anyone who is interested in this can also sign up and we will send them a house party kit. **Most importantly, you can sign your class up to join in on the tele-town hall with Senator Reid.** On the day of the event, you will receive a call asking you to join in. Then you can listen and even ask a question. This would be a tremendous

learning opportunity for your students, and having a big turn out on the call will show Senator Reid how important the issue is. The date and time of the tele-town hall have not yet been determined.

After your classroom discussion, please send the sign-up sheets through email or snail mail to Rachel Johnson at rjohnson@americanvaluesnetwork.org or 1901 N. Fort Myer Dr. Suite 901 Arlington, VA 22209.

Sisters on the Planet: Discussion Guide

Introduction

Show the video. The entire movie is a half-hour long, or you can show each woman's story separately if there is not enough time for them all. After the video, begin by asking:

- What are your first responses to this video? Did anything in particular strike you? What and why?

Allow your students' responses to these questions to determine which direction the conversation moves. Questions for discussion are provided below. You do not need to cover all the questions (and you likely will not have time to do so), nor do they need to be asked in any particular order. They are merely provided as a guide to help facilitate conversation and present a number of directions you can take it to best match your class's needs/interests.

Discussion Questions

One of the reoccurring themes in these women's stories is that weather patterns are not as stable as they once were which is disrupting agriculture and making it difficult for communities to know when to plant crops.

- Does this experience resonate with our lives at all, or is it wholly unfamiliar?
- Are we ever forced to reflect on how our sources of food are impacted by weather? How aware are we of where our food comes from?

- Can anyone in the class think of times when the supply of any of their food was disrupted? E-coli threats? The loss of corn crops in the mid-west after severe flooding? Sick cattle or chicken? If you were impacted by these instances or others like them, to what degree was your life affected?
- What would it be like to be entirely dependent on food grown in your community?

Note that the areas in which these women live consist primarily of poorer populations – both abroad in third world countries, but also here in the U.S. One often overlooked aspect of climate change is the devastating impact it is already having on the lives of the poor.

- Martina says that in her own life she has witnessed the changes in the land caused by climate change. Why have we in the U.S. not more directly or severely experienced these changes? What are some of the things we do to protect ourselves from the effects of climate change? Are we able to do those things because of our country's wealth?
- “Adaptation” is a term used to describe how communities are adjusting to the changes in their circumstances as a result of climate change. The work Sahena does in her community to help them prepare for natural disasters and to protect food and water supplies is a small-scale form of adaptation. Should we be doing more to help poor communities internationally and domestically adapt to the changes they are experiencing on a larger scale? Being one of the wealthiest and strongest nations in the world, does the U.S. have an obligation to help with these efforts? Should we be giving money to help poorer populations adapt and, if so, how much?
- Sharon and Sahena's stories emphasize the importance of not only responding to disaster, but of taking steps to protect people from further harm. What steps should be taken to prevent further loss of human life? Is large-scale action needed by the U.S. or on the global stage? Do we have a responsibility to act? If so, is it our government that is responsible or only individuals and private groups?
- Sahena presents preparing for natural disasters as part of her daily life. Can anyone in the group share an experience when their life was impacted by a

natural disaster? What would it be like to have storms and flooding that continue to grow more severe be a constant threat in your life?

- At one point, Martina asks, “Is it really people here who are damaging the rain patterns and climate?” Consider that the U.S. has 4 percent of the world’s population, but produces nearly a quarter of its CO2 emissions. It is the emissions of wealthy nations that are most directly contributing to climate change, but the poorest among us are the ones experiencing the consequences. Does this mean we have a responsibility to help them? Should our government care about moral arguments about how our actions are affecting non-citizens?

The stories in this video come from women all over the world. Most often, discussions of climate change will center on areas such as Africa where there are severe droughts, or southeast Asia where there is widespread flooding.

- Is climate change a *global* threat? How urgent do you think the threat is?
- Were you surprised to see someone from the United States included in this video? Did Sharon’s story provide anyone with a different perspective on the threat posed by climate change? Have you ever connected hurricanes like Katrina and Rita with climate change?
- Considering that natural disasters have quadrupled in the last year, and have been increasing in intensity, what impact is climate change having on the United States, both directly and in terms of the aid we offer other regions?
- Are we responding to climate change with an appropriate sense of urgency? If yes, why? If no, what more should we be doing? On the global stage, what role should the U.S. play among other nations in responding to climate change?

Although not directly addressed in this video, a coalition of [22 senior U.S. Generals](#) backed by several CIA reports have said that climate change will be one of the greatest national security threats our nation faces in the coming decades. As oceans rise and rivers and lakes dry up, there will be increasing population pressures (like the one following the drying of Lake Chad and mass-migration that followed and played a key role in the Darfur genocides) that will destabilize regions, result in wars over

resources, and create hotbeds for extremism. [[Click here for a fact sheet on how climate change threatens national security](#)]

- Does this information change the way you view the threat of climate change?
- Does the U.S. really need to worry about destabilized 3rd world countries? Could one make an economic argument for investing in adaptation now to avoid paying the much larger military costs (to say nothing of the human ones) of war or peacekeeping later?
- Climate-related factors contributed to creating ungoverned places in Afghanistan in the 1990s, which allowed the Taliban to come to power. Do situations like that make climate change more of a threat to the United States? What do you think would cost more, 8 years of war or helping people in another country have access to food and clean water?