

LET THERE BE... STUFF?

A SPIRIT-FILLED RESPONSE TO A CONSUMER-CRAZED WORLD

A Baha'i - inspired Program for Youth created by

www.storyofstuff.org

www.greenfaith.org

Story of Stuff Baha'i Team

version 1.0

SESSION 1 - CARING FOR CREATION

These materials contain three main sections:

- TO THE FACILITATORS: Explanations about how to facilitate Session 1.
- SESSION 1 – PLAN: A step by step guide through the session. Each activity is explained here.
- SESSION 1 - HANDOUTS: These are all the readings and materials that need to be copied for each participant. They will be used throughout the session as indicated in the Session 1-Plan.

TO THE FACILITATORS

PREPARING FOR SESSION 1

Congratulations, you are about to launch the course! The spirit and purpose of the session is to instill a sense of awe and wonder at Creation and to build a strong foundation for a rich and productive journey together as individuals and as a group.

Overview

This session launches the program, helps the group form, and sets up the structures for the participants to learn together. It focuses on helping the youth open their hearts to feel the awe and wonder of Creation in a way that moves and inspires them to take better care of it as Earth stewards. It provides a context for the journey they are on and the challenges ahead and establishes ways they can support each other in and between class.

Goals

- To develop the virtues of **caring** and **stewardship**.
- Open the hearts of the participants to feel the wonder and awe of Creation.
- Build a safe, respectful, and supportive community.
- Develop a strong commitment to participate fully in this course.

Themes

- Awe and wonder at Creation
- Earth stewardship

Facilitation Tips

Make sure you really feel comfortable with the flow of the session so you can be as relaxed and welcoming as possible. The most important thing is to start off on the right foot and create a good feeling among the group as they start their adventure together.

This session can establish the level of safety participants feel in expressing themselves honestly. Take the time to really hear and validate feelings the young people share. The more you establish a safe space for sharing what will likely be positive feelings in this session, the easier it will be for the youth to share more difficult emotions when they come up later in the course.

Materials for Session 1

- ☐ Participant Roster
- ☐ Session 1 Handouts printed out (pages 8 – 11 below)
- ☐ A ball of green (or other color) wool yarn or string (organic wool with natural dye if possible) for Ice Breaker
- ☐ Computer and internet for the videos (or download videos)
- ☐ Projector for video if your group is large. (A small group can watch the videos from the computer.)
- ☐ A stack of nature magazines (ask your community to donate magazines.)
- ☐ Colored pens/pencils/non-toxic markers
- ☐ Scissors, glue stick
- ☐ Butcher paper
- ☐ Optional (for buddy set up): 1 Hat or bowl, small papers with students' names
- ☐ Binders – 1 per student, repurposed binders are best.

Session 1 To-Do List

- ☐ Print Handouts for Session 1 (pages 8 – 11 below).
- ☐ Put Handouts for Session 1 into each binder.
- ☐ Have binders for each participant ready to hand out.
- ☐ Print participant roster.
- ☐ Mural – post a piece of butcher paper on the wall prior to the session. (If a mural is not an option, bring one or more poster boards, depending on the size of the group. Two to four youths could collaborate on one poster.)
- ☐ On your computer, open the video with the prayer “Blessed Is the Spot”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh10F3xw4x4>
- ☐ On your computer, open the website with the video “Eco-camp connects love of nature and the Baha’i teachings”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SarFr2SIBrl>
- ☐ Optional: Buddy selection – write each student’s name on a piece of paper and put it in a hat.

SESSION 1: OVERVIEW

ENTER & CONNECT 10 Min.

GETTING ORGANIZED
PRAYERS
WELCOME
INTRODUCTIONS

ICEBREAKER Web of life 7 Min.

INTRODUCE – 10 Min.

VIDEO ON THE BEAUTY OF NATURE
SHOW AND TELL

REFLECT 30 Min.

SPIRITUAL READING
SHARE IN PAIRS

EXPRESS – 10 Min.

MURAL MAKING: Caring For Creation

ENACT – 17 MIN

GROUP PROMISE
SET UP BUDDIES
ACTION PLAN

EXIT – 5 MIN

Total estimated time for this session is about 1 hour and 30 minutes.



SESSION 1 – PLAN

Caring For Creation

ENTER AND CONNECT 10 MIN

Warmly welcome the youth and give them name tags and pens to write their names.

Getting Organized

Instructions:

Hand out binders. Explain to the participants that they will be collecting all the materials from each session in their binder. Point out the virtue of reusing binders and the opportunity to make an old binder beautiful with creativity. Encourage them to decorate their binder cover. They will be sharing their binder cover at the beginning of the next session. Put the Handouts for Session 1 already into each binder before the session. You will find these Handouts below, just scroll down.

Opening prayers

Listen and watch this beautiful rendition of the prayer “Blessed Is the Spot”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh10F3xw4x4> The length of the video is 3:22.

Ask one or more participants to say a prayer. You will find one prayer as a suggestion in the Handout for Session 1. (Just scroll down.)

Welcome!

Let them know how happy you are that they care about Creation enough to take the time to learn how to take good care of it together. It's going to be a great adventure, one that could change their lives in ways that honors and protects God's Creation and gives them a deeper, more enduring joy.

Introductions

Go around the circle and have each participant share their name, where they live and go to school, and one thing they want others to know about them. As they do, take role on your roster. When you introduce yourself, share what inspired you to lead the course and why you want to work with teens in particular. Bring humor!

ICE-BREAKER 7 MIN

Web of Life

Instructions:

1. Sitting in a circle, hold the ball of yarn up for all to see. Say, "Let's take a minute to appreciate the Earth that is our home. (pause) Consider the land, the water and air that support life on our planet. (pause) Think about the amazing variety of living things. (pause) And now bring to mind one thing, living or nonliving, that is especially meaningful to you.

2. Take the end of the yarn in one hand, and say, One thing I love about the natural world is _____ because _____. (Give your example)

3. Holding the end of the yarn, toss the ball to a person across from you in the circle. Each person repeats the statement, filling in the blank with their own thoughts. Each holds onto the yarn and tosses the ball to someone across the circle.
4. When everyone has had a turn, focus on the web you have created. Say: We are all connected to the natural world and to each other. In some ways, our lives are woven together with people, plants, and animals all over the world.
5. Every time we use something, we can think about how it is connected to the web of life. For instance... What do you think it took to make this yarn? (Let the youth answer questions) The wool, (pause) the sheep, (pause) the person who tended the sheep, (pause) the food the shepherd ate, the loom, the factory workers, the grass, the rain, the sun, etc. etc. all the way to God. When you look at this yarn, can you see the sunshine and rain? Can you see God's Creation?
6. Invite reflections on the exercise as you wrap the yarn back onto the ball. End with this quote, attributed to Chief Seattle:

Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.

INTRODUCE 15 MIN

Introduction

Ask the participants to open their binders which include the Handouts for session 1. In a circle, have them read the **Introduction**.

Activity – The Beauty of Nature

The purpose of this activity is to introduce the topic of the beauty of nature. Depending on your circumstances and time available, you can either watch a video together or do the Show and Tell activity. Of course, you may do both. 10 Min. for both would be sufficient, unless you choose to go outdoors for Show and Tell.

Watch a Video

Share the following video that shows the beauty of Creation:

Eco-camp connects love of nature and the Baha'i teachings 5:09

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SarFr2SIBrI>

Let the youth briefly share their impression of the video.

Show and Tell

Say: You don't have to travel far to appreciate nature, God's Creation. Show the group a native flower or some other beautiful thing growing or living in your surroundings. If you have a lot of time and have some nature close by, you could also take a short walk. Each youth may look for something that they are most impressed by. It could be a cloud, or the way a tree is casting its shadow, a piece of bark, a beetle ...

REFLECT 30 MIN

Spiritual Reading (15 Min.)

Ask the participants to open their binders which include the Handouts for session 1.

In a circle, read the **Spiritual Reading for Session 1– In Praise of Creation**, one paragraph per person. Create a spiritual atmosphere and allow sufficient time for brief conversations and comments. You may like to read some of the quotations twice.

Share in Pairs (15 Min.)

1. Have participants get in pairs to reflect on the **Discussion Questions**. (10 min). You will find these questions in the handouts.
2. The pairs come back to the large circle and share some of their reflections with the whole group (5 min.) Ask each pair to share one or two of their highlights from their conversation.

EXPRESS 12 MIN

Mural Making – Caring For Creation

Purpose

The youth will be creating a series of murals together corresponding to the themes of the sessions. The murals will help them share what they are learning with their community and inspire others. Their first mural expresses their care for Creation.

Preparation

Have butcher paper posted on the wall and magazine, scissors, pens, and glue available. (If you are unable to make a mural in your location, use one or more poster boards instead. Two to four participants could work on one poster board.)

Instructions

1. Post a large piece of butcher paper on the wall or pass out poster board(s).
2. Offer the stack of nature magazines, scissors, markers, and glue.
3. Have someone print the title: Caring for Creation.
4. Invite students to look through the magazines, find a picture of the specific part of the natural world that inspires them to care for Creation, cut out the picture and paste it to the butcher paper or poster.
5. Then, write a sentence under the image that explains what inspires them about it.
6. Have them share with the whole group what they wrote and why they picked that part of creation.

ENACT 17 MIN

Group Promise (5 Min.)

Invite the youth to make some promises to each other about this course. The purpose of the promises is to help make this course a good experience for everyone and to create safety. The group and you may come up with your own ideas for promises. You may like to include some of the following:

Reliability - We will make our best effort to attend each session of this course.

Truthfulness - We will take risks to share truthfully our personal thoughts and feelings during this course.

Respect - We will help create a safe environment by listening carefully and not making fun of others.

Trustworthiness - We will not reveal personal information shared by others during our sessions. What we hear here we will keep here.

Positive Speech - We will not speak negatively about others. This group is free of backbiting.

Service - We will participate in any service project that we may undertake as a group.

Ask them for a consensus to keep their promises and write them all down in your notebook so that you can refer to them in later sessions.

Set up Buddies - Optional (2 Min.)

Preparation: Put participants' names on small pieces of paper and put the names in a hat or bowl.

Explanation: You are going to set up buddies for the program. Let them know that the purpose of a buddy is to provide support for the actions they choose to do between sessions and to make it more fun. We can't do it alone; we need each other.

Have the youth volunteer to draw their buddy's name out of a hat. Once buddies form, if somebody's name gets chosen who already has a buddy, just take the name out of the hat and have the person choose another name. (Change the buddies each week.)

Action Plans (10 Min.)

Explanation:

Because becoming good Earth stewards means taking new actions in their lives, the participants will be choosing and committing to taking actions between each session. The action plan will set the youth up to take one or more simple action until the next session.

Instructions:

Ask the youth to find the Action Plan in their binder.

Briefly go over the Action Plan instructions together.

Have them decide on one (or perhaps more) action for the week.

Instruct the participants to keep these sheets in their binders for easy reference.

EXIT 5 MIN

Remind the participants to:

- Decorate their binders.
- Carry out their planned actions.
- Point out the opportunity to practice the virtues of caring and stewardship of the Earth when carrying out their actions.
- See the awe and wonder in Creation!

Closing Prayer

Ask one of the youth to say a closing prayer. (There is one included in the handouts.)

OPENING PRAYER

'Abdu'l-Baha

In this course, we will learn about how human beings are harming nature and people. Every week, we will talk together and share our thoughts and feelings. It takes courage to face the reality of how our lifestyle is affecting the community of life on Earth. Fortunately, we are in this journey together. We will find guidance in the Baha'i Writings and other holy scriptures. And we will take some small actions every week. We all can make a difference and help to care for the Earth, our home.

- increased your love for nature and humankind,
- gained knowledge about the stuff that is such a big part of our lives,
- developed your sense of social justice,
- taken some actions in your personal lives that can make the world a better place.

The Story of Stuff - a Baha'i-inspired Program for Youth, Session 1

SPIRITUAL READING – PRAISE OF CREATION

All religions teach that a great Spiritual Force created the universe. The Old Testament, for example, starts:

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.

Genesis 1

The New Testament begins:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

King James Bible, John 1 – 4

Islam teaches:

It is He Who created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon; all (the celestial bodies) swim along, each in its rounded course.

The Qu'ran

21:33

Have you ever looked at the night sky and wondered about the age of our universe? Scientists don't know its exact age, but they believe that the universe started around 13 billion years ago with the Big Bang. The Big Bang was a great explosion. "In a fraction of a second, the universe grew from smaller than a single atom to bigger than a galaxy. And it kept on growing at a fantastic rate and is still expanding today. Time, space and matter all began with the Big Bang."

Information from http://www.esa.int/esaKIDSen/SEMSZ5WJD1E_OurUniverse_0.html

Planet Earth is about 4.5 billion years old. The creation of the universe and of life is a great mystery!

And guess, when did life on Earth start? The Baha'i Teachings explain:

Life on this earth is very ancient—not one or two hundred thousand, or even one or two million years old: It is ancient indeed, and the records and traces of ancient times have been entirely obliterated.

'Abdu'l-Baha / 41. Universal Cycles

Science confirms that life on Earth began about 3.8 billion years ago. First, there were simple one cell organisms such as bacteria. Multicellular life evolved over a billion years later. Fish started to appear about 530 million years ago, and plants 475 million years ago. Mammals existed only since 200 million years ago. And how long do you guess human beings have been around? - Our own species, Homo sapiens, appeared only 200,000 years ago. So humans have been around for a mere 0.004% of the Earth's history.

When we think about God's creation and all its physical and spiritual laws, we are filled with awe and wonderment. The Baha'i writings even explain that there has always been "creation" as the Creator has always existed. This can only increase our astonishment. We find such feelings beautifully expressed in these words by Baha'u'llah, the prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith:

All praise to the unity of God, and all honor to Him, the sovereign Lord, the incomparable and all-glorious Ruler of the universe, Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things, ...

Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah XXVII

Religions teach that nature is sacred because it is a creation of God. Baha'u'llah wrote:

*Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. ...
Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world.*

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Wisdom

Baha'u'llah also explains how we should look at nature:

Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God.

Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, XCIII, p. 177

In a prayer, Baha'u'llah shows practical examples of how every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God:

Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness;

and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty.

And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur.

And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.

Baha'u'llah, Prayers and Meditations CLXXVI

According to the Baha'i teachings, God created both the spiritual and the material world and we human beings are living in both of these worlds. We will certainly want to help preserve God's beautiful Creation for the many people and creatures who will come after us.

Stewardship of creation is therefore a major part of religion. This is beautifully expressed in the Jewish tradition:

When God created the first human beings, God led them around all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said: "See my works how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! Think of this, and do not corrupt or destroy My world.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7

To summarize, religion teaches us to love people and all of God's creation, as Baha'u'llah said:

Take pride not in love for yourselves but in love for your fellow-creatures.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Wisdom

DISCUSS AND SHARE IN PAIRS

Reflect in pairs on your relationship to nature and creation. Choose from the following questions and discuss your favorite topics:

- What is your favorite place outdoors? What do you love about it?
- What happened there that was special for you?
- Have you ever felt God's presence outdoors? Where and when? What happened?
- What feelings came up as you reflected on Creation?
- How does it feel to think about how we are harming Creation?

CLOSING PRAYER

... O my God! Let no harm beset me in times of tests, and in moments of heedlessness guide my steps aright through Thine inspiration. Thou art God, potent art Thou to do what Thou desirest. No one can withstand Thy Will or thwart Thy Purpose.

The Bab

ACTION PLAN

Instructions

Read and think about the actions:

- Which action(s) would you *like* to do?
- Which seem like you *could* do them?
- Which seem like fun?
- Which seem as if they will really make a difference?

Choose which one(s) of the many suggested actions you are planning to take. Remember to consider the time you will have available and your other obligations.

Remember to:

- Show your parents your action plan when you get home and ask them to support you.
- Remember to apply the **virtues of caring and stewardship** when carrying out your actions.
- If you are working with a buddy, check in at least once this week.
- You can change your action plans.
- You can catch up on any unfinished actions at anytime.
- Take pictures or document what you do so you can share it!

My Action Plan after Session 1

Create/Express

- ☐ Inspired Art (or poetic writing) - Spend the week with a camera, a sketchpad, or a notebook, taking photos, drawing pictures, or writing a poem every time you are inspired by something in nature.

Communicate

- ☐ Stewardship Poster - Make and display a poster for your family, school, youth group, library, religious community, or home that reminds us of our call to be stewards of the earth.

Spiritual Development

- ☐ Start and end each day looking out the window and thank God for something you feel grateful for about the natural world.

Learn

- ☐ What's THAT? - Pick some aspect of nature that you want to learn more about and do some research about it. Write it up in one page.

Connect to Nature

- ☐ Garden Time - Spend time in a garden. Plant your own or volunteer in someone else's. Find out about any community garden in your area and go visit it.
- ☐ Plant It - Talk to your parents about growing some herbs, veggies, or flowers at home and then (weather permitting) plant something! This can also be done in a pot on a balcony.

Lead by Example

- ☐ Take a Hike - Skip the movies this weekend and coordinate a local hike with friends to get out into nature and really soak it in. It is free, it is gorgeous, and nothing inspires stewardship for the earth like a little time in nature.