



Requesting environmental information: classroom activities for KS2

Children learn about their rights to request environmental information. They'll discuss questions they might have about the environment in their local area and explore who they can ask, in local and central government, to find the answers. They'll understand there are laws which give everyone the right to ask for information about their local area. As a class, they will write and send a request for environmental information. This information could help with developing your school's outdoor area.

Learning outcomes

- explore who might be “in charge” of different activities which help look after your local environment
- understand there are two kinds of government
- identify questions, about the local environment, which are difficult to answer on your own
- understand there are two laws which help you answer these questions

Step by step

1. What is in your local environment?

This activity encourages learners to consider various aspects of their local environment.

Ask learners to imagine they are walking down a street. At the end of the street is a park. Ask learners:

- What do you see on your way to the park?
- What do you see in the park?

Discuss ideas as a class.

Alternatively, organise a class walk to the local park. Adapt the previous questions to reflect the local environment.

Discuss activities that help ‘look after’ the local environment. For example, bin collection, recycling, In collaboration with

Green Skills



Suitable for

Key Stage 2

Location

Indoors

What you need

Paper
Pens

Key vocabulary

Rights
Law
Environmental information

Suggested curriculum links

Citizenship

English

Computing

Geography

water treatment, upkeep of parks and green spaces. Discuss activities that affect the local environment. For example, new buildings or building development, roadworks, pollution and air quality.

2. Who is “in charge” of these things?

Explain there are two kinds of government - local government and central government.

Ask learners: What do you think central government is in charge of? Learners might say the army, police, hospitals, motorways, railways, utilities and post. Some of these are handled directly by central government and some are handled by organisations on behalf of the state. The important thing is that learners understand some big things, which cover the whole country, are controlled from one place.

Ask learners: What do you think local government is in charge of? Learners might say things like bin collection, looking after elderly or vulnerable people [social care], leisure centres, libraries and schools.

Ask learners: What are you in charge of? This question helps learners think about their personal responsibilities. They might say not littering, helping with recycling and looking after shared spaces.

3. What would you like to ask the people who are “in charge”?

This is an opportunity to explore what learners want to know about their local environment. It can help shape your school’s Nature Park work.

Ask learners: What would you like to find out about your local environment? Or What would you like to find out about your school grounds? Discuss ideas.

The questions learners identify will depend on your school site. For example:

- Have any trees recently been cut down at our school?
- Who looks after the trees at school?
- Have there been any local studies of wildlife in our area?
- Is there wildlife on our school grounds?
- What is the air quality like around our school?

Write learner’s questions down and share with the whole class. Ask learners to discuss if there are any questions they could research themselves. Remove these questions from the list.

Ask learners: Would these questions be better asked to central government, local government or a different organisation?

Explain there are lots of public authorities in the country, covering many aspects of our lives. Learners may not know who to ask. This is ok and should be acknowledged and discussed. The administrative structure we live within is complex. It can take time and effort to find out who is “in charge.” Knowing how to start looking, and stay patient, is important.

In collaboration with

4. How would you ask them?

Discuss with learners the different ways of getting in touch with an organisation. For example, in person, on the phone, via social media, a contact form on their website, email or posted letter.

Collaboratively list the pros and cons of each method. For example, in person might be inconvenient and social media is public (so everyone can see it). It is important to highlight that if learners ask a question in writing they can keep a copy. This is helpful for remembering exactly how the question was phrased and the date it was asked.

5. There are some laws which allow you to ask for information

Explain to learners it is important we can ask the organisations “in charge” to give us information. It’s so important there are two laws giving everyone the right to ask questions. The Freedom of Information Act allows you to ask for all kinds of information which might be held by a public organisation. The Environmental Information Regulations protects your right to ask for environmental information about your local area and the country.

6. Make a request for information which will help plan/develop your school’s Nature Park

Reflect on the questions created in activity 3. Ask learners: Is there one question you would like to ask as a class? If there are multiple options learners could vote.

Ask learners: What is the best way to ask this question? Prompt learners to consider that a written request, via email, is probably the most efficient way to make a request which you can follow up on. For example, if you don’t get a response.

Discuss how to structure the request and what information to include.

Review the ICO’s website guidance on making a request prior to doing this. The guidance can be found here: [How to access information from a public authority | ICO](#). The sections “Top tips” and “What should my request look like?” are particularly helpful for structuring the request. Write the request as a class.

Send the class’s request directly to the public body, or via [whatdotheyknow.com](#). There’s more information about this website in the educator guidance titled requesting environmental information with learners.

6. Communicate your findings

It will probably take up to 20 working days for the learner’s response(s) to arrive.

When they do, read and discuss the response(s) as a group. Consider if learners are satisfied with the information. There may be further action learners need to take.

If information has been disclosed to the class, or they have been directed to information which is already publicly available, look at the information together.

Ask learners: How could you present this information to your peers? For example, via a poster, a webpage or an assembly. Ask learners to consider if they could connect it with information they already have.

In collaboration with

Ask learners: How does the information you have received link back to your Nature Park work?

Encourage learners to discuss their experience of making a request. Ask learners:

- Was it easy or difficult?
- What have you learnt?

Encourage them to consider the subject of the information request and what they've learnt about the way the country works.

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