

The Web of Life

By Nicola Winters



**Biodiversity, Interconnectivity
and An Gorta Mór**



Nicola Winters

Nicola is first and foremost an explorer of life and a lover of nature. Having travelled extensively, she is inspired by diverse cultures and ways of being, especially indigenous cultures attuned to living in harmony with the natural world.

Nicola is curious about how to integrate such wisdom into our modern lives, and is passionate about the potential of education as a vehicle for empowerment and change. Nicola holds workshops which inspire and motivate people to take actions that promote care for the earth, ourselves, and one another. She holds a BA in English, Media and Cultural Studies, an LLM in Human Rights Law, has completed her training in forest school leadership, and is currently undergoing a 3 year plant medicine apprenticeship. As mother to a busy 2 year old, she is all the more curious about what it will take for us as a species to thrive as members of the web of life within the ecosystem of Planet earth, and is encouraged to be part of the wonderful work of Afri.

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Afri was founded in 1975 and works on justice, peace, human rights and sustainability issues. We provide workshops for secondary school and third level students We organise an annual Féile Bríde gathering, a hedge school, and famine walks in Mayo and Carlow. We work in partnership with Development Pamoja and the Kenya Pastoralist Network.



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Introduction



These Lesson Plans devised by Nicola Winters started out as reflections on An Gorta Mór but – showing that all things are interconnected – they expanded to include many other topics and issues. For over three decades An Gorta Mór has been at the core of Afri’s work. The death of a million people from hunger amidst plenty and the forced migration of another million and a half marked the lowest point in our history. We believe that it is imperative that we learn the lessons of that experience for present and future generations.

An Gorta Mór had many causes, the most obvious of which were colonisation, laissez faire economics and monoculturism – over dependence on one variety of potatoes. Extraordinarily and tragically, out of at least 2000 varieties of potatoes, the landless Irish had become dependent on one variety – the Lumper. When blight struck, the entire crop was wiped out with catastrophic consequences. Demonstrating the importance of biodiversity, a variety of potato known as ‘Butes’ were grown in an area of Kerry at that time and these were completely unaffected by blight.

Showing how slow we are to learn the lessons of history, neo colonialism and neo liberal economics continue to cause hunger and poverty throughout our world today. While the loss of biodiversity and the corporate takeover of seeds is happening at an unprecedented pace. Along with climate change and the horror and wastage of warfare, these are the most crucial challenges that face us in the years ahead.

As Nicola points out in these Lesson Plans, we all can be – and need to be – activists for change. We can take small steps and big steps to bring about the change that is necessary. We can buy locally grown food or grow our own; plant broadleaf trees and/or wild flower seeds in our gardens or window boxes; become seed savers; buy second hand or ethically produced clothes and goods; support political and economic change that puts care for our planet at the core; oppose war; reduce meat consumption or become vegetarian and support divestment campaigns to withdraw support for fossil fuel or weapons industries.

Greta Thunberg tells us that, ‘no-one is too small to make a difference’ while Nelson Mandela assures us that ‘It only seems impossible until it is done’. Inspired by their words and their example, let us make the 2020’s the decade of change, new hope and new beginnings.

These Lesson Plans are stepping stones towards that change and towards a better and more sustainable future.

Joe Murray

PREFACE

These lesson plans are designed with Transition year students in mind. That said, some of the activities and links could be used by junior cycle students with some minor adaptations of the more complex concepts and language. Similarly Senior Cycle students would also benefit from activities within the lesson plans alongside deeper analysis and questioning.

Transition year Units

The Lesson Plans compliment the following Transition Units:

Linking and Learning; Together for Rights; Global Development Issues; Debating Development; Good Food – The Irish Experience; Environmental Studies; Food Matters; Introduction to Genetics and Biotechnology; Ireland – A Level Playing Field.

The lessons compliment and build on the experience of Junior cycle studies in C.S.P.E (Stewardship and civic responsibility); English (reflection on writings and expression of ideas and feelings); Geography (exploration of global issues and the effects of climate change on the environment and political/economic decisions); Science; Business studies; Religious Education; History (International relations and Famine).

As for Senior Cycle, there are cross curricular opportunities in the following subject areas: Geography (Global Interdependence); History (Colonisation, Economic consequences, decolonisation, trade, aid and famine); Religious education (The religious imperative to act for justice and peace); Ethics; Politics and Society; Social Education and Contemporary Issues in Leaving Certificate Applied; Leaving Certificate Economics (multinational companies, international trade and globalisation, developing countries and development, sustainable economic growth); Home economics (Social and Scientific); Biology (nutrition, biological diversity).

Teachers may also find the activities helpful in achieving their WorldWise Global Schools Passport. More information on the work of WWGS and the range of supports available for teachers and schools can be found at www.worldwiseschools.ie

Nicola Winters



LESSON 1

The web of Life – Everything is Connected

Theme: Everything is connected (systems thinking pillar of Global Citizenship Education). *Write the theme on a board to be referenced throughout lesson.

** Interconnectivity in GCE terms:

Global citizenship has been defined as: “recognising the interconnectedness of life, respecting cultural diversity and human rights, advocating global social justice, empathising with suffering people around the world, seeing the world as others see it and feeling a sense of moral responsibility for planet Earth.”¹

In effect, rather than seeing oneself as a citizen of a single country or place or identifying with oneself as a single TY student in a particular village/family etc, a global citizen sees their identity as transcending borders of politics, geography, culture, and operating as a member of the global earth community. This can be extended to include other non-human species that we are so dependent on for our survival.

1

Introductions: Introduce self; invite participants to write their name on a sticker; introduce Afri’s work relating to An Gorta Mór (5mins)

2

Reference point: Explain to participants that throughout our sessions together, we will be looking at how the past, present and future are also interconnected. If we forget or bury the past, we will not learn the lessons to do better in the future. Ask for their insight and any examples they can think of. Share the stories of the Iroquois and the Seven Generations Principle codified into their law: *‘Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground -- the unborn of the future Nation.’*

3

Embodiment exercise on interconnectivity: The purpose of this brief activity is as an icebreaker to get students out of their heads and into their bodies, and to show an embodied example of the concept of interconnectivity (5mins)

¹ <https://www.gooduniversitiesguide.com.au/education-blogs/after-graduation/what-is-its-global-citizenship-and-what-is-its-place-in-education>

- Each participant must secretly choose two people in the room. They must keep their choice a secret. They must place themselves equidistant between the two people they choose. They cannot stop moving unless they are equidistant or the facilitator asks them to freeze.

(This game can be expanded upon with words and concepts, by giving three participants 3 words and asking them to create a story about how the concepts are connected, e.g. Bees, Food, Nature; or Pollinators, Pollution, Economics; Health, Transport, Trees, etc.) * You may also choose to only use this part of the game especially in light of Covid precautions around movement in the classroom.

4

Mythology: Some reminders on the power of mythology for the facilitator - you may wish to ask the class what they think the purpose of mythical stories are and explore the following:

Charles Eisenstein: 'Myths are vehicles of truth...myths bring light to the shadows and reveal what has been repressed. They take a truth about the psyche or society and form it into a story'.

Chris Holland: "Creation myths are part of all human societies on this planet, often explaining how things came to be, setting examples of 'how to behave' and 'what happens if?'. Myths and stories are very powerful and have been used by those who wield power to influence others. I feel it is true to say that how we see the world and everything in it depends a lot on the stories we hear as we grow. Stories have power or medicine (borrowing a native American term) and can turn us into all kinds of people."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes: 'Story is a medicine which strengthens and arights the individual and the community'.

Estes: 'In this tradition a story is holy and it is used as medicine... The story is not told to lift you up, to make you feel better or to entertain you, although all those things can be true. The story is meant to take the spirit into descent to find something that is lost or missing and to bring it back to consciousness again.'

5

Share short myth from Chris Holland's book "I Love My World": pp 6-7 with time for a short lead-in and reflection.

'I Love My World', Chris Holland (pp 6-7):

To begin with a little story from long ago: One day, beside a rushing stream in the Welsh Mountains, I was talking to an elder I had met on the trail about stories. I told him I was interested in finding stories from all over the world, which would help humans living at this brief moment in the earth's story to remember we are all part of the same community, the same web of life that includes the rock, the plant and the animal kingdoms. We had only a few minutes together before our paths went in different directions. As a droplet of sparkling water splashed onto a mossy pillow beside the trail, he told me this very simple story:

There was a time when the creator sent a great race of rainbow people to live on this earth. They were a tribe of human creator spirits, people of many different skin colours - some were shades of green, some of brown... After a time these people became hungry and

cold because then the land was barren. Nothing grew, called out or flew. There was no shelter, no food. The tribe gathered in a big heap to keep warm. Then one of them said, 'I know! Let's all change into different forms. So we can nurture and feed each other'.

So it was that the people became the different plants and animals. Plants that climbed, sprawled, and rooted, animals that crept, jumped and flew. Some of the people who remained as humans shed tears of grief over the changes in their relatives, and where their tears fell, lakes and rivers formed. The tribe truly did nurture, shelter and feed each other. Since that day the walking people live each moment knowing that the plants, animals and rocks are all related and when the rainbows come they are reminded of all the races without whom they could not live and they remember what a wonderful place it is we live on: this planet we call Earth.

As he and I went our separate ways I couldn't help but feel my own sadness that we industrialized humans with TVs, central heating, shoes, tractors and cars have forgotten that the plants and animals are our relatives. They all share the same make up of nutrients from the soil, the water and sunlight. Everything that lives on this earth is a result of the interaction of the sun's energy with the elements of the earth. We are all interconnected systems of energy flow. We are life on earth and it's about time we all felt some kinship with the planet again.

6

Show film: How Wolves Change Rivers.²

7

Activity - Web of Life: This activity gets us moving again, and offers more examples of interconnectivity. Props needed: Ball of string. The facilitator writes words up on the board elicited from participants on what makes up the ecosystem of a native Irish woodland (for example, sunshine, wind, fox, tree, soil, bird, hedgehog, seed, bee, badger, spider, water, beetle, ladybird, humus, dead leaves, rat, etc.)

- Participants stand in a circle.
- The person who starts with the string is the sunshine. They keep a hold of the string and throw ball to the next person.
- The next person who takes the string identifies with an aspect of the woodland connected to the sun, eg, tree. They explain the relationship as best they can.
- This continues until everyone is holding the string and we have created a web of life.
- With the sting held taut, we can explore what happens if any element within the ecosystem is destroyed. For example if the bee becomes endangered (bee sits down), who/what else is impacted?
- *Participants can take turns to move through the web mindfully causing no harm, i.e, trying not to touch the web.*

²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q>

*You can conclude with a discussion on biological diversity vs monoculture; Irish woodlands³ native vs commercial Sitka spruce; case of Sioned Jones – Grandmother vs Coillte⁴ What other ways are we at war with nature? Brainstorm with your class.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES – DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION ISSUES



8 Show film to reflect on interconnectivity and the importance of protecting what is wild - watch Mary Reynolds introducing her book *The Garden Awakening*⁵ (forest gardens); or her talk at Afri's Feile Bhríde 2020 *Guardians not Gardeners*⁶ (wildness); Alternatively, show Ron Finley's film.⁷

³ <http://www.woodlandleague.org/>

⁴ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/spotlight/arid-40026140.html>

⁵ <http://marymary.ie/book-the-garden-awakening>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnbgWv8u32Q>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXcHwGjGhL8>

- Ask students what they have heard about the great Irish Famine.
- Ask what they think is the difference between the term “famine” and the term “deliberate starvation?”. (Reference Afri’s publication: ‘Famine is a Lie’ p13).⁸
- Explore with them what it means for a people to have access to land and control over planting and harvesting.
- Write the words “Food Sovereignty”, “Seed Sovereignty” and “Food security” on the board and explore. ‘You can be food secure in a prison’ Clare O’Grady Walshe.⁹ See footnote 10 below which clearly explores the difference between food security vs food sovereignty.^{10a}
- Discuss the peasant classes’ over-reliance on one variety of potato – the Lumper – and introduce the concept of foraging and some of the wild foods people relied on: charlock (Praiseach Bhuí); nettles (Neanta); Carrageen seaweed; hawthorn (Sceach); berries, etc. Maybe some our great-great-grandparents survived because they knew which wild plants to forage. Why have we lost this knowledge today? Why might it be important to revive the ancient art of foraging? Remind students that we will return in more detail to this theme in the next session.

10

Afri activity, “On a Single Day”: – Play Christy Moore’s music medley^{10 11} (*The City of Chicago and On a Single Day*) which speak about Irish people’s emigration to America and the food that was exported from Ireland during the Irish famine of the late 1840s. Students are invited to listen. If you wish you can share the lyrics (see below). Ask students for feedback having heard the song:

- What is the song about?
- Why do you think some people chose to leave Ireland? Was it a choice?
- Was Ireland producing food during the famine?
- Why did the Irish poor not have access to this food?
- What is Christy Moore reciting at the end of the video?
- How does it make you feel?
- Would you call the people who emigrated refugees?
- Explain that next session we will explore parallels between An Gorta Mór and so-called famines throughout the world.



Read p 15: ‘Famine is a Lie’, referencing the quantity of food that left Ireland in 1846.¹²

⁸ Publication ‘Famine is a Lie’ available from Afri.

⁹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5UJed3V_to

^{10a} <https://change4children.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Food-Security-vs-Food-Sovereignty.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mK0J5MfK4ow>

¹¹ Featured on Afri’s C.D. Music from a Dark Lake available from Afri.

¹² Publication ‘Famine is a Lie’ available from Afri.

Irish People Seeking Refuge



Activity 10: On a Single Day:

The City of Chicago and On a Single Day - lyrics

*In the city of chicago,
As the evening shadows fall,
There are people dreaming,
Of the hills of Donegal.*

*Eighteen forty seven,
Was the year it all began,
Deadly Pains of hunger,
Drove a million from the land,
They journeyed not for glory,
Their motive wasn't greed,
Just a voyage of survival,
Across the stormy sea.*

*In the city of chicago,
As the evening shadows fall,
There are people dreaming,
Of the hills of Donegal.*

*Some of them knew fortune,
And some them knew fame,
More of them knew hardship,
And died upon the plain,*

*They spread throughout the nation,
Rode the railroad cars,
Brought their songs and music,
To ease their lonely hearts.*

*In the city of chicago,
As the evening shadows fall,
There are people dreaming,
Of the hills of Donegal.
Written by Luka Bloom*

On a Single Day

On a single day, the 15th September 1847, at the height of the famine, the following goods were shipped out of Cork Harbour. 186 bags of flour; 286 barrels of barley; 334 barrels of wheat and 96 casks of ham; 486 boxes of eggs; 219 head of cattle.

On a single day ships sailed out of Cork Harbour with their bellies in the water.

***Action to conclude: Ask each student to find out about five wild plants growing in their locality that can be foraged for food/medicine/clothing/etc. Ask their grandparents/elders about their relationship with wild plants.**

LESSON 2

The web of Life – Seed Freedom



Theme: An Gorta Mór – Sovereignty of Seed and Self.

1

Intro: Quick name game (movement). Recap on previous week and theme of interconnections.

2

Mindful listening: Share this week's story from a yew seed. Invite participants to take out a page and pencil, and if they wish, to draw what is being described in the story. Or they are welcome to just listen.

'THE STORY OF YEW' BY GUIDO MINA DI SOSPIRO.

Twenty-four thousand and forty moons ago: I remember ... being born. I remember sprouting slowly from the soft Earth, and receiving mother's greetings, still so close to the ground, and yet already gazing up with my first leaflets...

...It had been drizzling for days and nights. Pelting, driving rain, the type of downpours we seedlings all feared, for it could easily snatch us off the ground. To be uprooted when there were practically no roots yet! But then the harsh rain had abated, and turned into the welcoming drizzle, caressing my brothers, sisters and me. Mother looked down towards us, lovingly, hoping we would finally grow out of Mother Earth.

It had been a long time since we had dropped to the ground wrapped in the pulpy flesh of a berry. It was then the end of summer, yet I recall an unseasonable warmth. So warm was it during the day and lukewarm at night that we were forced to ripen and fall ahead of time.

Most of us left by ways of the sky, swallowed by birds. These could digest only the berry, and eventually delivered the seeds here and there, where chance would have it. Others, like myself, were left to a wingless flight, sometimes lengthened by a gust of wind, but more often undisturbed by anything other than the pull of mother Earth.

About her I have already said a few kind words, which by no means do I intend to take back. "Soft Earth", however is a compliment indeed. When I landed on it, it felt more like crashing against it. True I dropped from one of mother's highest branches.

Also true, I had grown rather plump and... heavy, owing to the uncharacteristic warmth and mother's nourishing sap. I had fallen on virtually bare rock, neither soft nor warm, nor rich in elements essential to my growth.

With the coming of winter, I went to sleep. Winter saw to it. And so did the wind. And the leaves of many a neighbouring tree. An orchestrated effort. I know now that it was She, Mother Nature herself that saw to it.

A myriad leaves turned colour and fell from the trees in the forest. Not from mother or other yews though, for we are evergreen and do not change our leaves by dropping them all at once. Rather, from grand Oaks, slender Birches, and many other trees seemingly at random. Some of them, or perhaps many, I can't tell - I was slumbering - covered me like a warm blanket. In time, white powdery crystals came down from the sky, enough to fasten the leaves on the ground.

When Spring was sprung, the snow melted into countless rivulets, and the sodden leaves began to decay. Slowly, at first, for it was still quite nippy.

I was to sprout amid leaf mould, a rich surrogate Mother Earth had provided for me instead of the stark rock. Very little depth to it, but enough to sustain the initial growth, the most crucial phase in the life of any tree.

And so I sprouted, slowly, cautiously, beneath a crescent moon and a warm-hearted sun. Not too warm, I must own, and frequently darkened by clouds laden with rain. But these were welcome too, each ingredient contributing to the recipe of Mother Nature's Kitchen.

My memory was all there, already. It had been there even whilst I was taking shape among mother's branches. But it was blurred or perhaps dazed by the wonder of birth. The only thing I could make out distinctly was a feeling of uneasiness, one presumably caused by my own growth. The Sky was pulling me up and my fragile stem was growing as straight up as my strength would allow. Conversely I was experiencing a strong pull downwards. My first rootlet, the underground equivalent of my stem, was supposed to go straight down through the earth but how could I pierce solid rock? If I was alive it was thanks to the leaf mould and the little foil to be found in it by then I had gone through it and now what?

Well, I can state in retrospect that nothing is quite that fixed in nature. By my birthplace there was a gentle incline. Some of my rootlets went up the slope, by which I mean in the general direction of the stem, not quite straight up, but up anyway. In time I would grow stronger, and in all hopefulness, my roots would be able to burrow into the limestone crevices. Meanwhile, I could grow outwardly. My stem, my trunk-to-be, might not grow quite as high as it was meant to, but thicker, stouter. Tiny as I was, I keenly knew that I was already in love with Mother Nature's Kitchen. Why should I give everything up just out of a strict adherence to a North-South principle?

Being alive was delightful. I could sense that having made it thus far was the outset of a triumphant life. Why it must be! I wish you could have been gazing round as I was, all smells and sights, all enchantment. My two mothers; the leaves of grass between streams, lakes and clouds; the blooms brought about by springtide; the many seedlings as young and hopeful as I was; the Salmon and trout in the waters; the foxes and stags on the ground; the robins and chaffinches in the air... The world spun round, and I kept drinking the rain, growing on the earth, harvesting the sun.

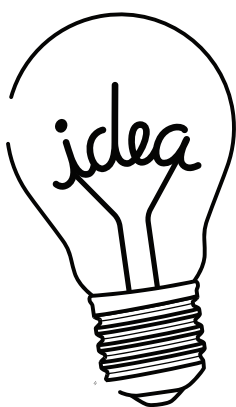
It was not merely an auspicious beginning. I knew then as I know now after the test of time that life with all its attributes, with all my attributes, was well worth living. There was great promise in it, and Mother Nature's Kitchen was bound to be a marvellous playground. As long as I learnt not to take and partake in excess, life would unfold gloriously, and open before me like a treasure House full of secrets.

- Take time for reflection.

3 **Introduce Vandana Shiva and show film on Seed Freedom.**¹³ On the board, write any difficult concepts to discuss further. Read aloud the script at the end of the film and explore/explain any new concepts.

4 **Introduce other stories of biodiversity and seeds** from around the world and the concept of Earth Jurisprudence. Ask students to come into groups of three-four, to read some interesting facts on biodiversity, and answer questions posed. See examples of facts and questions below.

* Feel free to amend and add your own information.



- 1** As Vandana says, seeds are the first link in the food chain and the repository of life's future evolution. And so it is our duty and responsibility to protect them and to pass them on to future generations. The growing of seed and the free exchange of seed among farmers has been foundational in maintaining biodiversity and our food security. The last twenty years have seen a very rapid erosion of seed diversity and seed sovereignty, and the rapid concentration of control over seed by a very small number of giant corporations.¹⁴ The disappearance of our biodiversity and of our seed sovereignty is creating a major crisis for agriculture and food security around the world. We must act before it is too late.

- Q** **What do you think are some actions we could take to improve seed and food security?**

¹³ <https://seedfreedom.info/invitation-to-join-the-global-alliance-for-seed-freedom/>

¹⁴ <https://seedfreedom.info/invitation-to-join-the-global-alliance-for-seed-freedom/>

- **2** Research shows that the world's indigenous peoples make up less than 5% of the total human population. Though small in number, they manage over 25% of the world's land surface and protect 80% of Earth's remaining global biodiversity.¹⁵

Indigenous people have long preserved seeds because they have important cultural ties within the community. According to Alejandro Argumedo from the Quechua, an indigenous group from Peru: "There's this big difference between just looking at seeds like biological materials that are important for farming...Indigenous people see them more as members of an extended family and to which you have to tend with care. Because there will be a reciprocity – they will be providing you ... food, will be caring about you...There are love and marriage rituals with seed that articulate Indigenous beliefs that love and respect between humans depends on and are nurtured by the land and epitomizes the commitment of couples to protect their seeds and food systems". Argumedo cites the "qachun waqachi" potato variety used in a marriage ritual, where the bride gently peels the potato to show her love and caring for her husband-to-be, as well as for Pacha Mama, or Mother Earth.¹⁶

Reflection: Any thoughts? Do you think growing up with such a respect for seeds would have you relate differently to seed?

- **3** About 1,000 kilometres south of the North Pole lies Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago. Home to roughly 2,600 people, it also has another, larger, more famous population: that of 1,057,151 of what? **Answer: Seeds.** The Svalbard Global Seed Vault was created to preserve seeds from around the globe that could eventually be lost as a result of natural or human factors. The vault's inventory includes everything from African varieties of wheat and rice to European and South American varieties of lettuce and barley.

- **Q What sort of natural or human factors do you think could cause us to lose seeds?**

Hannes Dempewolf, senior scientist involved with the Svalbard seed vault, says: "Every seed ...is unique in itself...They have a unique set of genes and we have no idea what they could be useful for in the future."¹⁷

- **Q Approximately 7,000 medicines prescribed by Western doctors are derived from plants. For instance, Aspirin, which is created synthetically in a lab, was created to imitate the natural compound salicin. Can you name the tree whose bark contains salicin (nature's aspirin)?**

¹⁵<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/11/can-indigenous-land-stewardship-protect-biodiversity-/#:~:text=Recent%20research%20demonstrates%20that%20while,percent%20of%20the%20global%20biodiversity.>

¹⁶<https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/what-on-earth-indigenous-seeds-tradition-1.5617755>

¹⁷<https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/what-on-earth-indigenous-seeds-tradition-1.5617755>

- **4** *SEED SOVEREIGNTY* is the fundamental right of all peoples and generations to grow, use, save, replant, breed, share, disseminate, exchange, barter and sell seeds. It includes the right of access to open-sourced seeds that are not genetically-modified or otherwise altered contrary to Nature's own system. Seeds are integral to biodiversity, covered by Earth Jurisprudence, and cannot be patented.¹⁸

- **Q Can you remember what it means to patent a seed?**

- **5** *Earth Jurisprudence, or Earth Law*, recognises that the Earth is embedded in a lawful and ordered universe. Our Earth uniquely sustains life as we know it through a complex system of living processes and laws, as a self-regulating planetary organism. All species, including humans, are inextricably subject to these laws and processes. Thomas Berry named this understanding of the Earth as the primary source of law, and reminded us that for most of human history, human societies across our planet have conceived law in this way. This is rooted in the understanding that disturbing the dynamic equilibrium which sustains the conditions for life, would ultimately lead to chaos.¹⁹

- **Q What is the name of Ireland's ancient native law practiced up until the English completed their conquest of Ireland in the early 17th Century?**

Answer: Brehon Law. Give some info on Brehon Law's respect for Nature, etc.

- **6** In recent years there has been a global surge in recognition of Earth Jurisprudence – eg. the United Nations' *Harmony with Nature* Dialogues; the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN); the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights; the 2010 Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth; A proposal for a UN' Crime of Ecocide; And a growing number of rulings recognising the Rights of Nature.

The current legal regime allows states and corporations to despoil the environment with impunity. This injustice has inspired a new movement of legal experts and citizens calling for the codification of ecocide as a fifth crime against peace, joining genocide, crimes of aggression, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Their work aims to transform our understanding of nature from property to an equal partner with humans in building sustainable societies.²⁰

¹⁸ <https://www.plantpartners.org/food-and-seed-sovereignty.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.gaiafoundation.org/areas-of-work/earth-jurisprudence/>

²⁰ <http://www.harmonywithnatureun.org/rightsOfNaturePolicies/>

- **Q What is Ecocide?**

Answer: Ecocide is the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished. For example, in both Ecuador and Bolivia, extractive industries continue to expand into indigenous territory, pursuing oil (in Ecuador) and mining (in Bolivia). Civil society groups have struggled to exercise nature's rights effectively.

- **Q Do you know of any destructive acts that have taken place against Nature in Ireland that could possibly be classed as ecocide?**

Q: Which Country was the first to grant a river the same legal status as human beings?

Answer: New Zealand. After 140 years of negotiation, the Maori tribe won recognition for the Whanganui River, now treated as a living entity under domestic law. Similarly India's Ganges River was recently granted the same legal status as a human being.

5

Introduce the work of Gaia, especially their work with Indigenous custodians of sacred lands. This offers an example of a powerful action to redress past colonial violence.²¹

- Share the story of the Bagungu in Uganda - 15min film²² - or share the story²³ through PowerPoint.
- Draw parallels with the Irish context of disempowerment in the lead up to An Gorta Mór, including the loss of knowledge caused by the decimation of a peasant class in Ireland. Reference the 'revolutionary act of remembering' that Afri embarks on each year with the Famine Walk. (see Gary Whitedeer's quote from 'Famine is a lie' p 5).

6

Planting seeds: The facilitator gives students acorns/ beech masts/chestnuts in pots. They will be asked to care for these and to plant in a suitable place when they are ready.

²¹<https://www.gaiafoundation.org/areas-of-work/sacred-lands-and-wilderness/>

²²<https://vimeo.com/373875301>

²³<https://gaiafoundation.nb2.giantpeachtest.com/bagungu-custodians-map-sacred-lands-part-journey-reviving-cultural-identity-restoring-territory-buliisa-uganda/>

7

Mapping: In their groups of three – four, have students draw a map of their school grounds and how it looks. Then ask them to imagine a more ecologically friendly school grounds and to map their vision of what this might look like. What features/species/areas etc might they include, what might they remove? Encourage them to dream big without any limitations on what is possible.

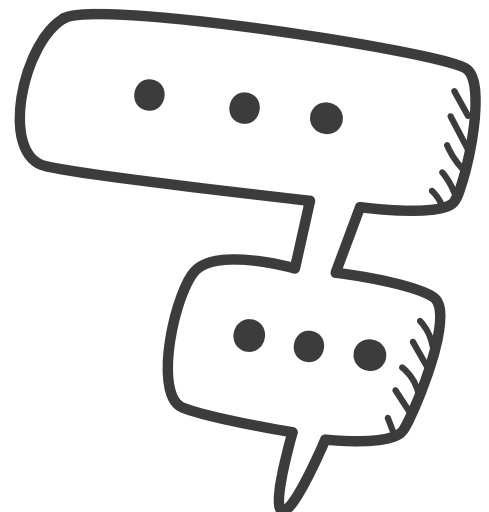
8

Share short Afri film: 'Food for Thought, Seeds of Change'²⁴ featuring Claire O'Grady Walshe. Include time for reflection and feedback from students.

9

Homework: Finally, challenge all participants to find a gardener who can help them to collect and save some wild native Irish seeds between now and the next session. Bring their collections to the next session. Ask them to consider starting a seed library with support from a knowledgeable gardener.

question?



²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksTijMm2EkQ>

LESSON 3

The web of Life – An Gorta Mór and Biodiversity

Theme: (Continuation of previous session): An Gorta Mór – Sovereignty of Seed and Self.

1

Intro: Recap on what students remember from the previous week.

2

Eisenstein’s film: ‘A New Story for the People’.²⁵

Share this week’s insight on stories, myths, and meaning-making through Charles Eisenstein’s film. This asks us to acknowledge the old story of separation that drives competition and greed, and consider a new story about how we are all connected and the significance of our actions when we act in service to something greater than ourselves.

- Leave space for reflection and discussion.

3

Quick movement game: – The Big Wind Blows

- Everyone, minus one, sits on their chairs in a big circle, all facing each other. One person starts in the centre of the circle, with everyone else seated. They say the following: “The Big Wind blows for anyone who -----”.
- The blank must be filled with a true statement about themselves related to social/environmental justice. Eg. “The Big Wind blows for everyone who has planted a seed”. At this point, any of the participants for whom the statement is true (including the person who is currently in the centre of the circle) must stand up and quickly find a new seat. One person will be left without a seat. This person becomes the person in the centre for the next round.

4

*Continuing on the theme of myth making, you may wish to read a relevant story or poem that you have come across. E.g. from *Anthology of the Earth*²⁶ or *The Lost Words: A spell Book*.²⁷

²⁵<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/a-new-story-of-the-people/>

²⁶<https://www.bookdepository.com/Anthology-for-Earth-Judy-Allen/9780763603014>

²⁷https://www.thelostwords.org/lostwordsbook/AAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y

5

Show Afri film: “The Great Starvation – Re-defining the Irish Famine”²⁵, featuring Clare O’Grady Walshe’s insights on seed sovereignty at the Afri Famine walk 2017 (1st minute and from 3’43 to 7’40). The focus is on access to seed, crop diversity and control of land.

- Invite students to share questions and reflections.

6

Story sharing activity:

In groups of 3 – 5, ask students to read one of the stories below. Using the Development Compass framework below, get them to write all the points from their story that fall under the headings of Nature, Economics, Society and Wellbeing, on separate post-its. Ask them to summarise their story using the compass as a cue, and to stick the post-its on a larger Compass for the class to see.

The Compass Principles

NATURE

The “Nature” Principle:
The physical and biological limits of Earth’s ecological systems must be respected.

WELLBEING

The “Wellbeing Principle”:
Human beings have a right to be safe, to have access to healthcare, and to have the opportunity for self- expression, self-development and a good quality of life.



ECONOMY

The “Economy” Principle:
Human societies, communities, and organizations need functioning economies to provide for their needs and to support their aspirations

SOCIETY

The “Society Principle”:
Social systems should be organized in ways that promote equity, fairness, resilience and opportunity for all.

Built into the Compass approach is a set of core guiding principles about sustainability.

²⁵<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/a-new-story-of-the-people/>

²⁶<https://www.bookdepository.com/Anthology-for-Earth-Judy-Allen/9780763603014>

²⁷https://www.thelostwords.org/lostwordsbook/AAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y

STORY 1: STROKESTOWN from Afri's 'Just a Second – Lessons from History' (p15)²⁹

STORY 2: THE CHOCTAW from Afri's 'Just a Second – Lessons from History' (p 21)

STORY 3: FAMINE IN CARLOW: (Adapted from a Thesis by Edward Brophy)³⁰

During the 1800s, there were many accounts that described Co. Carlow – "the garden of Erin", as one of the most fertile and best cultivated counties in Ireland. There were many descriptions of clean and well-ordered whitewashed cottages and new roads. It was seen almost exclusively as an agricultural county with soil most suitable for corn. Carlow butter was considered of a superior quality and was exported to the London market.

Why then was there a need for a workhouse in Carlow, which by all accounts, was a neat, prosperous town?

County Carlow in the 1830s suffered considerably from evictions by landlords. Carlow Priest Fr. James Maher wrote public letters condemning these actions. In one of his letters he mentions a townland – Slyguff – and points to the fact that five families whom he names, were evicted, which meant that twenty-two people were left homeless with nowhere to go, "What will become of these poor creatures", he asked, "when thrown upon a county where there is no provision made even for the poorest of poverty's children?". Having been evicted, some of those lived in the ditches where they remained for months, in misery which was impossible to describe. Others took to begging to eke out a wretched existence. Furthermore there was a phenomenal growth in population from the 1780s up to the 1840s, and as the population grew, the potato became the chief food of the poor.

The Carlow Workhouse opened in November 1844. Although the workhouse was built to cater for 800 inmates only, destitution was so prevalent that in 1847 there were over 1,300 paupers in it. Families were forced to enter together. On entering they were split up. Mothers and fathers were separated from each other and their children, and in some cases it was the last time they would ever see each other.

The diet in the workhouse at this time was eight ounces of oatmeal stir-about for breakfast and one pound of bread for dinner together with some milk. This was adapted by the Master of the workhouse as he saw fit.

"The Master produced to the Board samples of stirabout made from rice and Indian meal mixed – and Indian meal and oatmeal mixed. The Board were quite satisfied regarding the advantage to the health of the inmates from continuing

²⁹Publication available from Afri.

³⁰http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/5290/1/Edward_F_Brophy_20140805124258.pdf

to give three breakfasts in the week, composed of the first named materials and he was directed to purchase one ton of rice from J. Haughton & Sons at £28 per ton".

Examining the diet of food given to the inmates of the workhouse leaves one asking the question - what became of the extra food bought in? For example adding up the meat bought in each week for the first six months of 1847, one sees the total amount of meat at 7,810 pounds - 2,710 pounds bought in the first quarter, leaving 5,100 pounds of meat bought during the second quarter, April to June. Occasionally one notices extras bought in e.g. two dozen bottles of wine @ 30 shillings, and one dozen bottles of port @ 38 shillings a dozen.

Fr. James Maher, who continuously fought for the poor, wrote a letter in December 1847 criticising the lack of full government relief. He gave a scathing account of the inmates' diet in the workhouse, calling it "perfectly monstrous, the poor are defrauded - starved - their strength is wasted. The relief in Carlow workhouse is very considerably below the starvation point. The relief for those outside is still worse". At a Diocesan meeting of clergy that same month the general condition of the poor throughout the entire county was described thus:

"Destitution of the most appalling character prevails in many parts of the county. The disabled poor and the unemployed labourers are without food, without fuel, without clothing, seeking to preserve a wretched existence by feeding on the field turnip or by the charity of the benevolent... These statistics taken together present in what is considered one of our best circumstanced counties a frightful picture of the condition of the poor. What must be the amount of misery elsewhere?".

1845 and 1846 saw between 0-10 deaths per month in the Carlow workhouse during those years. 1847 shows an alarming increase, as deaths recorded rose from 21 in January, to 51 deaths in February, and 48 deaths in March. This number continued to rise and the questions arose where to bury the dead.

The local churchyards and graveyards were in danger of overcrowding, so the guardians were told that no more paupers from the workhouse could be buried in these places:

"It is represented to the Board that the usual place for burying poor persons near the town of Carlow is so overcrowded that there is not room for more interment there. The Board is also informed that in future no more of the paupers from the workhouse will be allowed to be buried there. In consequence of which the Board of Guardians think it advisable that a portion of the ground belonging to the workhouse be apportioned for the purpose of burying those who die in the workhouse and we approve of the plot of ground at the rear of the Infirmary and Idiots yard being fenced in and consecrated for that purpose".

Various illnesses which follow famine - typhus, cholera, dysentery etc - combined with the severe weather, lack of food, and inability to adjust to the Indian Meal diet, must have had certain influences on the death rate. The inadequacies and weaknesses of the system exacerbated the suffering of the population who, even though conditions in the workhouse were unbelievably appalling, had no other choice but to seek admittance.

*See Afri's publication 'They all had names: A survey of Tithe na mBocht and Famine Graveyards in Ireland'.³¹

STORY 4: SOUTH SUDAN (2014) from Afri's 'Just a Second - Lessons from History' (p31)

STORY 5: ECHOES OF IRELAND IN SUDAN from Afri's 'Just a Second - Lessons from History' (p32)

7

Seeds of change: Hand out square sheets of biodegradable/plantable paper. Ask students to consider what they have learned through our time together so far. What has inspired them and what would they like to create that is a part of a new story of solidarity with the whole earth community? Invite them to write this on their page. They will then take a seed and wrap it in the paper and plant this somewhere, perhaps in the school ground or in a pot, or perhaps they will put the page in the pot beneath their tree seedling.

8

Conclude with gratitude practice: Introduce the science of gratitude (i.e. the incredible benefits it has on our health and wellbeing). Invite everyone to reflect on and share, if they wish, something in their lives they are grateful for.



Carlow Famine Graveyard

³¹Publication available from Afri.

LESSON 4

The web of Life – Echoes from the Past



Theme: Echoes from the past – Emigration Today
– My Responsibility.

1

Check in: – recap, what do students remember from the previous lesson? Introduce the theme of this lesson.

2

Share today's story: Eg. "The King and his Hawk"³² (story that evokes qualities of a heart-centred activist).

3

Read quote: by Niall O'Brien in 'Famine is a Lie' (p15) – Take time to discuss and reflect on the questions raised.

4

Show Afri film: Famine walk 2015³³ featuring Maitet Ledesma from the Philippines speaking about the coffin ships today bringing an exodus of refugees from around the world (1 minute). Or for a longer version of theme, show Donna Vuma speaking at Afri Famine walk 2017 available on the Afri YouTube channel.³⁴

5

Syrian Case-study: Why People Flee – Created by RAMSI volunteers.

- Ask students to come up with reasons as to why people might leave their homes. Is there one reason or many? Ask the students why, in the summer of 2015, Europe experienced the biggest inflow of refugees since WW2. Brainstorm.
- Tell students that we're going to focus on Syria and, using images and props, they're going to work out the order of events that led up to the war.
- Put the images and props out on the floor and choose eight students (Group A) to pick one up and then, with the help of the rest of the class, put themselves in order of when the events happened.

²⁵<https://charleseisenstein.org/video/a-new-story-of-the-people/>

²⁶<https://www.bookdepository.com/Anthology-for-Earth-Judy-Allen/9780763603014>

²⁷https://www.thelostwords.org/lostwordsbook/AAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y

- Give eight more students (Group B) the slips of paper with the facts on them. They need to stand beside someone from Group A whose image/prop matches their fact.
- Read out to the rest of the class



Bashar al-Assad

Since the 1960s, Syria was led by the Al Assad family. Bashar Al Assad, the president, was considered by many of the population to be running an oppressive regime.



watering can

Between 2006-2010, there was a drought (linked by scientists to global warming). It led to the collapse of farming in northeastern Syria. Their jobs gone, around 1.5 million men, women and children surged into the cities.



protest

Al Assad failed to prepare or respond to the poverty, unemployment, homelessness and so people took to the streets.



gun/toy soldier

Al Assad's response? He ordered the army to open fire- hundreds died and thousands were arrested.

flags of different groups

It was the start of a brutal civil war. Small groups of armed rebels as well as extremist groups (including Islamic State, ISIS) appeared, all determined to bring down the government army. The only thing that unifies the rebel groups is resistance to Al Assad. External forces – including Turkey, Russia and the United States – intervened to back different factions.



Toy car, shoes

The Syrian population was trapped between the regime, rebel groups (including Kurds, an ethnic group fighting for greater autonomy), and extremists such as ISIS. Half of the population tried to find safety in other parts of Syria. Over four million fled the country. 95% of those four million live in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon.



tent

The refugee camps in the neighbouring countries became crowded and under-supplied. With no job prospects or prospects of having a normal life, Syrians looked to Europe.



lock

Countries neighbouring Syria began to close their borders



Toy boat/ Picture of sea or EU flag

People were now forced to seek refuge elsewhere – especially Europe

6

Show film on SDG's: *'Leave no one behind'*.³⁵ It highlights inequalities today and the refugee crisis.

7

Activists and human rights defenders



- Ask students to close their eyes. Tell them you are going to give them a word. When you say this word- 'activist'- you want them to notice all the images and words that come to their mind.
- Give them 10 seconds. Ask students to draw what comes to mind.

Is there much variety? Who is an activist? Can a teenager be an activist? A single parent? Do the students agree that anyone can be an activist?

8

Mingling with Activists: Have students walk around the room reading quotes from different activists. Invite them to stand next to their favourite quote, with no more than three people to each quote. Ask students in their groups of three to come up with ideas on how they could take action for positive change.

9

Idea-sharing Snowball:

- Give students a sheet of paper to rip up into three
- On each of the three pieces, they must write down an idea they have for an action that the class can do as a collective
- Get them to scrunch up the pieces of paper and on the count of three, throw the snowballs at each other.
- After a minute or two, ask them to stop, to pick up some 'snowballs' and read the idea out loud to the class.

10

Maybe conclude with Charles Eisenstein's short film: *'What Is It Like to Be You'* - This asks us to consider our impulse to always find an enemy to fight whenever we feel under threat. It asks, is there a better way to live life and to thrive?

Everything is interdependent

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99UN7so92tk>

NOTES





Afri