

Activity 2

Evaluating Citizen Action and Environmental Change Strategies
(90-120 minutes + assignments)



“The little, little grassroots people—they can change this world.”

—Lillian Njehu



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Evaluating Citizen Action and Environmental Change Strategies (90-120 minutes + assignments)

Grade Level: 9–12, College

Subject Areas: Social Studies, Civics, Government, Sociology, Environmental Studies, Political Science, World History

Standards: See **TAKING ROOT Recommended National Standards** (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/takingroot/classroom.html>)

Purpose of the Lesson:

In this lesson, students examine the community organizing/civic action steps that the Green Belt Movement (GBM) took to address Kenya's deforestation and to tackle the issues closely connected to this environmental issue, including women's rights, equitable economic development, political governance and the sustainable management of scarce resources. Students can use this investigation to help reach an overall understanding of the strategies that "change makers" and organizations use to address the issues they attempt to impact—leading them to the research of two activist organizations of their choice.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Explore the value and impact of civic engagement and citizen action
- Identify the strategies that The Green Belt Movement uses (and continues to use) to address deforestation and other issues connected to this environmental problem
- Assess the impact of citizen action in Kenya

Skills:

Analytical reading and viewing, note taking, interpreting information and drawing conclusions, critical thinking, identifying relationships and patterns, classifying, defining problems, synthesizing information

Materials:

- Computers with Internet access and/or with DVD capability
 - LCD projector or DVD player
 - whiteboard/markers or chalkboard/chalk
 - **TAKING ROOT Discussion Guide**
 - **Planting Ideas Action Guide**
 - **Wangari Maathai Timeline**
 - **TAKING ROOT Video Module 1 "Kenya & Wangari Maathai"**
 - **TAKING ROOT Video Module 2 "The Greenbelt Movement"**
 - **Teacher Handout B: TAKING ROOT Quotes**
 - **Teacher Handout C: Civic Strips**
 - **Teacher Handout D: Strategies**
 - **Teacher Handout E: Examples for Issues, Strategies, Impact**
 - **Teacher Handout G: Assignment Rubric, Activity 2**
 - **Student Handout B: TAKING ROOT Vocabulary**
 - **Student Handout C: Issues, Strategies, Impact**
- (Note: Above resources are available at <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/takingroot/classroom.html>)



Procedures:

Previewing Activity

1. **Think-Pair-Share:** Post the Civic Strips (see **Teacher Handout C: Civic Strips**) around the room. Instruct students to think about what the terms mean and what the words might mean to them personally. Present the students with the following questions:
 - Have you ever participated in a community action (environmental or other type)? What was the purpose of the community action and why did you do it?
 - If not, what issues are you concerned about? Is there an issue (i.e. health care, pollution, unemployment) that really interests you or moves you?
 - Do you have family or friends who are involved in community actions? What have you observed from their participation?

Have students turn to the person next to them and discuss their responses to the previous questions. Call on several student pairs and ask them to share what they've discussed aloud. Ask students to identify the value and impact of civic engagement; they should give examples, starting with civic action that is happening in their community.

2. **Provide Background Information on Kenya and Wangari Maathai:** Briefly introduce TAKING ROOT. Note that the film illustrates a real-world example of a group of Kenyan citizens who took (and continue to take) action to address environmental and social justice issues. Review the web-based timeline of events (**Wangari Maathai Timeline:** <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/takingroot/timeline.html>), focusing on the events covered in the module. Follow up by having students read pages 2 and 3 of the **TAKING ROOT Discussion Guide** and then ask them to reflect on Maathai's commitment to change and the steps that led her there.

**Other extended, lead-in options to include if you have the time:

- a) Have students listen to the podcast interview with Maathai, covering the making of the film and the environmental movement. You can find the interview on the ITVS Beyond the Box Blog: <http://beyondthebox.org/podcast-interview-with-wangari-maathai>
- b) Have students read Maathai's biography on the Nobel Prize website: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html
- c) Have students read "Root Causes: An Interview with Wangari Maathai" on the Mother Jones website: <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2005/01/root-causes-interview-wangari-maathai>
- d) Distribute quote strips cut from the Non-Violent Protest/Civil Disobedience section of **Teacher Handout B: TAKING ROOT Quotes** and have students take turns reading them out loud to the class. Have students share their initial reactions to the quotes.

Viewing the Film

3. Review **Teacher Handout D: Strategies** and post them for students to see. Have students predict which of these strategies Maathai and the Greenbelt Movement may have used to address the environmental and social justice issues of their country.
4. Distribute and explain the instructions for **Student Handout C: Issues, Strategies, Challenges, Impact**. Tell students that while they are watching a short video module about the Green Belt Movement, they can begin filling in the chart as they identify chart elements, and that they can continue to complete the chart after the film has ended. They should also use the names of the posted strategies from **Teacher Handout D: Strategies** (see procedure 3 above) to complete that column of the chart where applicable. Show **TAKING ROOT Video Module 1 "Kenya & Wangari Maathai"** and **TAKING ROOT Video Module 2 "The Greenbelt Movement."**



Reflecting on the Film

5. Divide students into pairs and have them work together to complete their charts. Have students refer to the Grassroots Organizing & Civic Education, Non-Violent Protest/Civil Disobedience and Women's Empowerment sections of **Teacher Handout B: TAKING ROOT Quotes** for further insight. Once students complete the chart, distribute a second blank chart. Have two sets of student pairs discuss their findings at a timed interval; once time is up, one pair shifts to sit with another pair to discuss findings. Have them “Give 1 – Get 1” idea with the other group, and tell them to record one finding on the new blank chart that they did not have before. Continue for a few rotations, so that pairs have a chance to compare notes with other groups.
6. Discuss the students' discoveries with them. Discussion prompts include:
 - What images and words stood out for you as you watched the video?
 - What issues were highlighted?
 - What were the most successful strategies used to address the issues?
 - What tactics were available to Maathai and the Green Belt Movement uniquely as women? How did they use and/or challenge Kenyan cultural norms?
 - What has The Green Belt Movement done for marginalized Kenyan women? Why is this work particularly important?
 - What is the power and value of grassroots civic engagement/citizen action in Kenya?

Assignment

7. **Comparing Two Grassroots Organizations:** In pairs or alone, have students research other grassroots “change makers” and organizations doing work around the world. (Online resources are listed on page 4). The students can choose two change makers according to their various interests (i.e. according to geographic region or the issue being addressed) and compare those. Consider having students choose change makers who are addressing the same or similar issues, but in different countries or contexts and/or using different approaches. Ideally, students should compare a leader from a developing country and a leader from a ‘developed’ country.

Once students choose two grassroots leaders to analyze, they should compare the approaches and strategies of these change makers to each other, as well as to Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement. Questions that students should consider in their comparisons are:

- What are the issues each leader is addressing? Are they unique to their region?
- What are the main challenges each leader is up against? Do they remind you of the challenges the Green Belt Movement encountered? What challenges do these change makers share (if any)?
- What are some of the strategies and tactics that each leader is using to address the issues at hand? Compare the strategies used by the two selected leaders as well as the strategies you learned from the Green Belt Movement.
- What elements of grassroots civic action are different in developing versus developed countries? Which elements/strategies are similar, regardless of the country?
- Do you think there are there any “universal” elements to grassroots activism and organizing?

Students should compile and present their research using their choice of a variety of multimedia forms: audio, video, music, photographs, PowerPoint, podcast, website, poster, collage and pamphlet/booklet.



Resources for student research on grassroots leaders:

Ashoka: <http://www.ashoka.org/fellows>

The Ashoka Fellows are leading “change makers” worldwide and they provide great case studies.

Echoing Green: <http://www.echoinggreen.org/fellows>

Echoing Green Fellows are examples of grassroots leaders who are addressing social problems in innovative ways.

The New Heroes <http://www.pbs.org/opb/thenewheroes/>.

The New Heroes tells the stories of 14 individuals who are successfully alleviating poverty and illness, combating unemployment and violence and who are bringing education, light, opportunity and freedom to poor and marginalized people around the world.

Resources for grassroots leaders with an environmental focus:

The Goldman Prize: <http://www.goldmanprize.org/>

The Goldman Environmental Prize is the world’s largest prize honoring grassroots environmentalists, recognizing environmental heroes from each of the world’s six inhabited continental regions. Wangari Maathai received the Goldman Prize in 1991.

Brower Youth Awards: <http://www.broweryouthawards.org>

The Brower Youth Awards are the premier awards honoring bold, young, environmental leaders.

Assessment

Use **Teacher Handout G: Assignment Rubric, Activity 2** to assess students’ research. Students should receive the rubric to guide their article writing.

Extension activities:

1. Have students assume the role of newspaper journalists to “interview” a person featured in the film (see list of individuals on page 3 of the TAKING ROOT Discussion Guide). Interviews can be about, for example, the issues in Kenya that affect them, their involvement in the Green Belt Movement, their concern about deforestation and its impact on their life, and so on. Students compile their interviews to create a “newsletter” for The Green Belt Movement or case studies for a group dealing with global deforestation.
2. Read “Activism versus Negotiation: Strategies for the Environment Movement,” (<http://homepage.mac.com/herinst/sbeder/activism.html>) an article that examines the differences between environmental activism and negotiation. The article poses the question whether the two might coexist. Students can research organizations that combine the two to identify strategies and impact.
3. Use the Planting Ideas Action Guide to develop and execute a tree-planting plan for a local project. The United Nations Environment Program’s Billion Tree campaign (<http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign/>) can be another key resource.

