

**Sustainability**

**Framework**

for ELT

## Young Learner Activity Cards



**CAMBRIDGE**

*Where your world grows*

## HOW TO USE

Sustainability includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes we need to make a fairer, brighter future for people and the wider natural world. We want to make it easy for you to teach sustainability skills in your classroom. To help with this, we have created these activities for you to use with your learners.

Each card in this pack contains details of a face-to-face activity to practise a component from one of the dimensions within the Sustainability Framework for ELT. If you have to plan a lesson with little or no time to prepare or need some ideas for activities to help your learners develop their sustainability skills, we hope you will find plenty of inspiration in these cards. At the same time, you can be sure that your learners are developing key sustainability skills to become informed, compassionate, and innovative agents for positive environmental, social, and economic change.

# GUIDANCE NOTES

- All the cards in this pack can be used as standalone activities, but many of the activities also work in sequence across the components. For deeper engagement with sustainability skills, try combining different activities within each dimension.
- If you are teaching online, try using different tools and resources to enable learners to collaborate and share their ideas. Here are a few useful tools to try:
  - Virtual collaboration tools, such as [Jamboard](#), [Miro](#), or [Lucidspark](#), are a great way for learners to brainstorm, share and organise ideas.
  - Digital portfolios, such as [Padlet](#) or [bulb](#), enable learners to collect, organise and share different pieces of work with each other.
  - Shared online documents, such as [Google Slides](#) or [Google Docs](#), enable learners to work collaboratively.
  - Online design tools, such as [Canva](#) or [Visme](#), enable learners to create visual designs, illustrations, or storyboards (a story presented in a series of pictures) of their ideas.
- Talking about environmental, social, and economic sustainability topics can be challenging for learners, especially in a second or other language. In these situations, a bilingual approach may be helpful. In classes with a shared first language, try using the learners' LI to explain complex concepts. In multilingual classes, use the [Cambridge Learner's Dictionary](#) to support learners in translating and understanding key vocabulary in English. To find out more about the benefits of using LI in the classroom, read our Cambridge paper on [The Use of LI in English Language Teaching](#).

# THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The United Nations (UN) [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) are a collection of goals, all connected to each other, designed to be 'a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all' (United Nations, n.d.). The SDGs are a great source to consult when planning lessons or projects with the cards. If you have time, try using an activity card as a starting point and then combine it with one of the SDGs to make a full lesson. You can see the SDGs below, and find out more about them [here](#).



# REFERENCES

## To cite this resource:

Blue, J. (2022). The Sustainability Framework for ELT Activity Cards: Young Learners. [pdf]  
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

**Jade Blue** is an English language teacher, trainer, materials developer and researcher who works closely with the Product Insight & Ideation team at Cambridge English. Jade is the author of a wide range of articles, teacher guides and research guides, and has presented at various conferences, including the international IATEFL conference. Jade's primary research interests focus on learner-generated visuals in ELT, learner autonomy, and integrating life skills into classroom practice.

## References

United Nations Sustainable Development (n.d.). Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals – United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>.

# Knowledge

## Young Learner Activity Cards



CAMBRIDGE

Sustainability

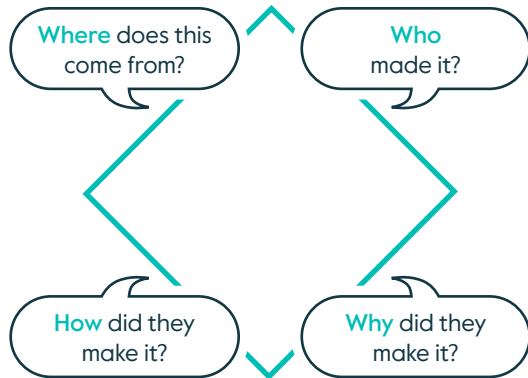
Framework

for ELT

## Recognising the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability

### WHERE, WHO, HOW, WHY?

When learners encounter food items or objects in the coursebook, encourage them to think about their origin and their impact on the world by using a 'Where, Who, How, Why?' framework (as shown). Put learners into groups, draw or project the framework with the questions on the board, and give each group a blank copy of the framework. Ask learners to write or draw the object in the centre, and then discuss and draw their ideas for each question in the speech bubbles. Finally, ask groups to compare their ideas with the class.



## Engaging with information and data relating to sustainability and regeneration

### WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

When learners visit outdoor places (e.g. the school garden or the local park), ask them to count and record the number of living things they see. For example, learners might count the number of flowers in the school garden, or the number of insects they see during a week.

Do this activity regularly and encourage learners to notice any changes. Ask them to discuss why the number might be increasing or decreasing.



## Identifying and understanding obstacles to sustainability

### WHAT STOPS THIS?

When learners encounter sustainability topics in the coursebook, for example, when talking about recycling or equality, encourage them to talk about what might prevent these things from happening. For example, people might not recycle if they don't know which materials can be recycled; people might not think about the needs of people they don't meet in their daily lives.

## Broadening discussion and including underrepresented voices

### OPEN UP THE CHAT

When discussing classroom topics relating to sustainability, ask learners to 'open up the chat' outside of school. In class, brainstorm and agree on two or three questions for learners to ask family members of different ages, or other members of their local communities. Learners can agree on questions in English, but they can also translate them into their LI to encourage deeper conversations outside of class.

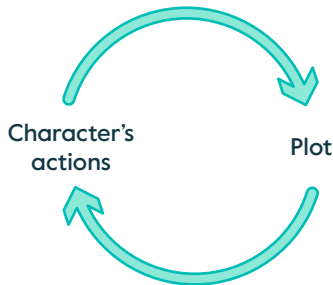
Invite learners to share what they found out in the next lesson – using LI if necessary – and support them with translating key vocabulary into English.

## Identifying components and their roles within a system

### ACTION AND PLOT LOOPS

When learners read or listen to stories relating to sustainability in class (e.g. stories that involve nature or fairness), draw or project the diagram shown here on the board.

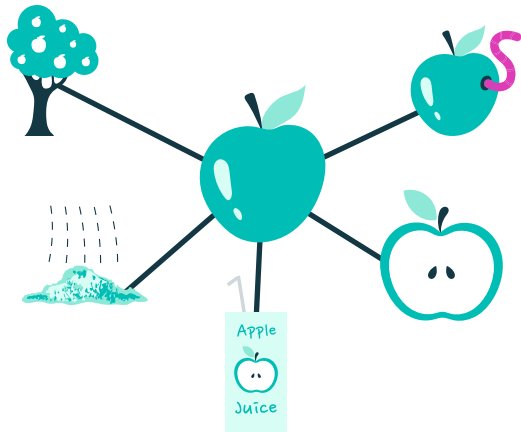
Ask learners to think about how the characters' actions influence or change the plot, and how the plot influences or changes the characters' actions. Ask learners to choose one of the characters in the story, and to draw a diagram showing their ideas.



## Finding connections within and between systems

### PICTURE CONNECTIONS

When learners encounter an image of a plant or animal in the coursebook, ask them to draw a picture of it in the centre of a piece of paper. Ask them to think of connections between the plant or animal and other things (e.g. with a picture of an apple, learners might draw the inside of the apple, a worm eating the apple, the tree that the apple grew on, the rain going into the soil where the apple tree grows, and a carton of apple juice). Encourage learners to think about how these things and processes are connected to each other, and have them draw pictures to show their ideas.



## Understanding observable and hidden consequences

### THE TIMELINE OF THINGS

When learners talk about everyday objects in class (e.g. a kitchen appliance or digital device) encourage them to think about the history and the future of the object. For example, ask:

- Where and how was it made?
- Who made it?
- What happened to it after it was made?
- Did it stay in the same place, or was it shipped somewhere else?
- Who bought it, and where from?
- How long will it be used for?
- What will happen to it after it can't be used anymore?

Ask learners to put their ideas onto a timeline, and encourage them to think about the sustainability issues surrounding the lifespan of the object.

## Identifying the potential for alternative outcomes

### CHANGE THE ENDING

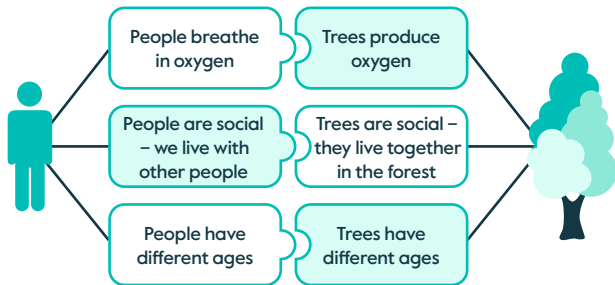
When learners read or listen to stories relating to sustainability topics in the coursebook, encourage them to think about how the story might end differently, and what would need to change in order for this to happen. Choose a point around the middle of the story, and have learners work in pairs to draw a storyboard of an alternative ending.



## Recognising relationships with each other and the wider natural world

### THE WORLD AND I

When learners encounter elements of nature in the coursebook (e.g. an image of an animal or plant), draw or project a framework on the board (as in the example shown) to encourage them to identify connections between people and the natural world. Use the same framework to encourage learners to identify connections to animals, other individuals, and groups of people.



## Exploring how living beings in an ecosystem depend on each other for survival and growth

### ANIMAL WORLD DIAGRAMS

When learners encounter wild animals in the coursebook, put them into pairs and ask them to choose one animal, and to think about the world this animal lives in. Ask pairs to discuss the questions below, allowing some time for them to research the animal online if necessary.

- What are some things this animal needs to survive?
- How does this animal get food? Where does it shelter (i.e. protect itself from the weather or danger)?
- What are some things, living or non-living, that this animal interacts with?

Next, ask learners to draw a picture or diagram to represent their answers. End by asking them to discuss what would happen if one of the elements they identified were removed.



## Understanding social and environmental responsibilities

### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

When coursebook content refers to a social or environmental issue (e.g. healthcare or recycling), ask learners to consider their own responsibilities in relation to this issue. You can also ask them to consider what other people, groups or organisations should do.

Ask learners to draw their ideas, and use the learners' drawings for further discussion of what they, other people, groups and organisations should do.

## Considering the welfare of present and future generations

### EVERYONE IN THE FUTURE

When discussing problems and issues in class, ask learners to think about and discuss how the issue affects people in the world now, and how it might affect people in the future. Next, ask them to think about whether how we are affected is good or bad, and what might be better for people in the future.

Write on the board 'I want everyone in the future to...' and ask learners to complete the sentence (e.g. 'I want everyone in the future to be able to have clean drinking water.'). Finally, invite learners to consider what might need to change in order for this to happen.

# Values

## Young Learner Activity Cards



CAMBRIDGE

Sustainability

Framework

for ELT

## Exploring sustainability beliefs and values

### WHAT MATTERS TO ME

When learners encounter sustainability-related topics in the coursebook, invite them to think about how important the topic or issue is to them. Write the statements below on the board, and ask learners to come and draw a picture of themselves or write their names under the statement that they feel is true for them. Allow them to choose more than one statement if they want to, and invite learners to discuss their choices in groups.

This is important  
to me.

This isn't  
important to me.

This is interesting  
for me.

This isn't  
interesting for me.

## Understanding how beliefs and values contribute to sustainable and unsustainable behaviours

### WE DO THIS BECAUSE

When learners encounter sustainable behaviours in the coursebook (e.g. someone planting trees, or someone buying second-hand clothing), write on the board:

'Maybe people do this because they believe \_\_\_\_\_.'

Invite learners to think about and discuss what people believe or value that makes them behave in this way. Elicit some ideas of how to complete the sentence and write these on the board.

## Examining one's own sustainability behaviours

### WHAT DO WE DO?

When learners encounter sustainability-related topics in the coursebook, encourage them to think about what actions different people take in relation to the topic. Choose some of the questions below and write them on the board:

- What do people in my school do?
- What do my friends/family do?
- What do I do?
- What would I do if I had more time/money/power?

Invite learners to draw a picture to represent their ideas. Next, ask learners 'How does this help?' and ask them to add to their picture, showing how people's actions have a positive impact.

## Sharing one's own sustainability beliefs and values

### I BELIEVE

When learners encounter sustainability-related topics in the coursebook, ask them to draw a picture of themselves, with two speech bubbles around them.

Write the following on the board:

- I believe...
- I think this is important because...

Ask learners to finish the sentences in relation to the topic so that they are true for them, and to write them in the speech bubbles. Next, hold a class mingle (an activity in which learners walk around and read their sentences aloud to other members of the class).



## Showing empathy and compassion for all forms of life

### MY WEEKEND WITH NATURE

At the start of the week, invite learners to share any experiences they had with the natural world over their weekend. Perhaps they walked in the park and looked at plants and trees; perhaps they played with an animal or swam in the sea. Making this a regular class discussion will motivate learners to notice and engage with the natural world more frequently. Use the questions below to aid discussion:

- What did you see/hear/smell/feel?
- What did it make you think about?
- How did it make you feel?



## Understanding human rights and social justice

### EVERY CHILD

When you introduce a new topic from a coursebook (e.g. food, school, etc.), write the topic on the board and draw a picture of a child next to it. Ask learners ‘Should every child [have access to healthy food / be able to go to school]?’ and elicit why or why not.

Next, ask learners what else every child should have access to. Give some ideas to help (e.g. clean drinking water, shelter, etc.). Then ask learners how they think some children might feel if they are not able to do these things, and hold a class discussion.

Finally, invite learners to draw a picture – or make a class collage – of all the things that every child should have access to.

## Engaging in environmental regeneration

### BETTER THAN WE FOUND IT

When learners encounter coursebook topics relating to nature and the environment, write the following questions on the board and hold a class discussion about them:

- How can we make sure we don't cause any damage to this [environment/animal/place]?
- How can we make sure that we leave it better than we found it?

Elicit practical ideas from the class, and write these on the board. If possible, set up a class project based on one or more of the ideas to encourage learners to participate in environmental regeneration (e.g. by holding a litter picking event or by planting trees in the school garden).

## Promoting sustainable development

### SPREAD THE WORD

When learners discuss environmental sustainability solutions, ask them to think about how they might explain this issue and solution to different people in their lives (e.g. friends, parents, grandparents, neighbours). Work together with learners to help them write a sentence describing the need for the solution (e.g. 'recycling is important because...') in English and in their LI. Help them practise speaking their sentences.

Invite learners to say their sentences to family members and people in their local communities, collect their reactions, and feedback in the next lesson.

## Recognising and exploring emotions

### THIS MAKES ME FEEL...

When learners talk about sustainability-related topics in coursebooks, encourage them to talk about how the topic makes them feel. Use a smiley face chart like the one below to help learners describe how they feel, and encourage them to give reasons.

Embarrassed



Bored



Worried



Upset



Angry



Hopeful



Excited



## Holding and reconciling tensions

### MIXED FEELINGS

When learners encounter sustainability-related topics in the coursebook, write the topic at the top of the board, with the following sentence stems below:

- I feel happy that...
- But I feel sad that...
- But I feel happy that...

Explain that it is normal to have mixed emotions about an issue. We might feel sad that an animal is endangered, for example, but happy that an organisation is trying to help save it. Or, we might feel happy that we're eating a burger, but sad that the burger comes from a cow. Explain that sometimes we can feel both happy and sad about something. Point to the topic and sentence stems on the board, and invite learners to share with you how they feel about the topic. Continue the chain for as long as learners have ideas to share.

## Demonstrating resilience and adapting to change

### WHAT'S CHANGED?

When discussing topics in the coursebook, invite learners to identify big changes that have happened or are happening in relation to the topic (e.g. Food – more people are becoming vegetarian / The Environment – climate change). Write the following questions on the board for learners to discuss:

- How does this change affect my everyday life?
- How do I feel about this change?

Explain that sometimes change can make people feel stressed or unhappy. Elicit some ways in which people can feel okay about big changes in their lives (e.g. talking to friends, focusing on positive things).

## Generating hope in self and others

### HAPPY WORLD WALL

When learners encounter positive sustainability content in the coursebook (e.g. success stories or positive sustainability action), ask them to draw a picture illustrating the content. Collect pictures over a period of time to build a 'happy world wall' in the classroom.



# Innovation

## Young Learner Activity Cards



CAMBRIDGE

Sustainability

Framework

for ELT



## Critically evaluating sustainability claims

### FACT OR OPINION?

When learners encounter sustainability data or information in the coursebook, write on the board 'Fact or opinion?' and elicit or explain the difference (a fact is something that is known to have happened or to exist, especially something for which proof exists, or about which there is information. An opinion, on the other hand, is a thought or belief about someone or something). Draw learners' attention to typical language used for opinions (I think/believe, in my view, etc.) and explain that facts are usually supported by evidence or data.

Ask learners to look at the information in the coursebook, and to decide whether it is likely to be a fact or an opinion, and why they think so. Allow time for learners to research online to find out further information about the topic.

## Seeking out personal, local and global perspectives

### WHAT DO MY NEIGHBOURS THINK?

When discussing sustainability topics and issues in class, encourage learners to find other opinions and viewpoints. Work together to agree on a set of two or three questions for them to take home and ask family members, neighbours, and/or people in their local communities. For example, when talking about water usage, learners might ask 'Do you think it's important to save water?', and 'Why/why not?' Invite learners to share what they found out in the next lesson.

## Framing and reframing issues

### CHANGING THE QUESTION

When learners discuss sustainability problems and issues in class, write a question for discussion on the board. Once learners have discussed the question, write it again underneath, but this time change one or two words, and invite them to discuss the new question. Are their answers the same, or different, and why? Repeat this procedure a few times (see the example below), inviting learners to suggest changes at each stage.

How can we make people recycle?

- How can we *help* people recycle?
- How can we help *organisations* recycle?
- How can *people make* organisations recycle?
- How can *organisations* help *people* recycle?
- *What* can organisations help people recycle?

## Understanding the bigger picture

### PICTURE PERSPECTIVES

Bring several sets of around 8–10 photographs into class, each showing different types of people (e.g. in different places around the world, of different ages, or with different jobs). When discussing sustainability issues in class, put learners into groups and give one set of photographs to each group. Ask learners to think about what each of the people in the photos might think about the issue.

Once learners have discussed all the photographs, ask them to group them into different sets, placing people who may have similar views together. Finally, invite each group to share their ideas with the class.

## Imagining alternative futures

### IN THE FUTURE, ...

When learners discuss sustainability issues in class, ask them to think about how the issue could be better for everyone in the future. Write on the board:

'In the future, ...'

Elicit ideas from the class for how to finish the sentence. For example, when talking about poverty, learners might say: '... everyone has enough food', '... everyone has a comfortable home', etc.

## Recognising opportunity for positive transformation

### A BETTER PICTURE

When learners encounter situations relating to sustainability in the coursebook, ask them to think of ways in which the situation could be better (e.g. the ocean might have less litter, shops might use fewer plastic bags, etc.). Invite learners to choose one of their ideas and to draw a 'better picture' of the situation.



## Identifying sustainable alternatives

### FROM TRASH TO TREASURE

At the end of a coursebook unit, invite learners to bring in waste materials from home (e.g. cereal boxes, plastic bottles, etc.). Tell them they are going to make something new from the waste material (e.g. a practical object, toy or piece of art), and that it should be connected to the coursebook topic. Give learners time to think of ideas and a plan for what they want to create before making their new object.



## Innovating for sustainable development

### SUSTAINABLE SPACES

When learners encounter 'spaces' in coursebook topics (e.g. a bedroom/bathroom/kitchen/classroom/park, etc.), invite them to brainstorm ideas for how the space could be adapted to make it more sustainable (such as in the examples below). Ask learners to draw pictures of their ideas and share them with the class.

bathroom	reduce water usages
kitchen	turn off appliances
park	plant more trees



## Tackling sustainability issues and challenges

### SOLUTIONS WALL

When learners encounter sustainability issues in class, encourage them to brainstorm possible solutions to the issue and to make quick drawings representing each of their ideas. Display these on a wall in the classroom, and ask learners to add to them each time you discuss a sustainability issue.

Refer back to the sustainability wall at the end of the term, and invite learners to think about whether they can implement any of their ideas for solutions over the holidays.

## **Promoting equality, non-discrimination, and equity in sustainability solutions**

### **IS THIS FAIR?**

When discussing solutions in class, write the following words on the board: race, gender, age and ability. Elicit or explain the meaning and ask learners to give you examples of different types of people in these categories (e.g. Ability: a blind person / a deaf person / someone in a wheelchair). Then, ask learners to think about the sustainability solution you have been discussing, and to decide whether the solution is fair for all of the different types of people.

## Justifying decisions and solutions in relation to their sustainability impact

### THIS HELPS

When learners generate ideas for sustainable solutions or alternatives, ask them to examine and justify their ideas by completing the sentences below and discussing their ideas:

- This helps people by...
- This helps the environment by...

## Evaluating the effectiveness of sustainable solutions

### GOOD; BAD; BETTER

When learners encounter (or identify) implemented solutions to sustainability problems, ask them to think about and discuss the following questions:

- What was good about the solution?
- What was bad about it, or didn't work?
- What could change for the solution to be better?

# Transformation

## Young Learner Activity Cards



Sustainability

Framework

for ELT

## Understanding one's personal agency

### ME AND US

When setting up sustainability activities in class, encourage learners to think about their own individual and collective agency by asking them to discuss the following questions:

- What can I do myself?
- What can we do together?

Then, ask learners to discuss the similarities and differences between what they can do by themselves and what they can do together.

## Understanding the relationship between agency and outcome

### WHAT HAPPENED?

When learners read or listen to stories relating to sustainability in class, choose one or two characters from the story and write the questions below on the board:

- What happened at the end of the story?
- What did this/these character(s) do?
- Could they have done anything differently?
- What would have happened if they had done this?

Have learners discuss the questions in pairs before sharing their ideas with the class.

## Recognising the potential for collective action to enact and amplify change

### TOGETHER WE CAN...

Before group activities and projects relating to sustainability topics, ask learners to think about what they will be able to do together that they wouldn't be able to do alone. Write the sentence stem 'Together we can...' on the board and elicit ideas from the class for how to complete it.



## Inspiring agency in others

### YOU CAN DO IT!

When carrying out group tasks and activities relating to sustainability, ask learners to support and encourage each other. Elicit or provide some useful language for learners to encourage each other (see examples below) and ask learners to practise these phrases in activities.

- You can do it!
- You're doing great!
- You're really good at...
- Why not try...

## Appreciating cultural diversity

### DIFFERENT CULTURES

When learners encounter sustainability-related topics and issues in the coursebook, ask the following questions:

- How do you think this might be similar for people in different cultures?
- How do you think this might be different for people in different cultures?
- What can we learn about this from people in different cultures?

## Encouraging fair, respectful and equitable interaction

### FAIR TO EVERYONE

Begin by writing the word 'fair' on the board and eliciting or explaining the meaning (treating someone in a way that is right or reasonable, and treating a group of people equally). Invite learners to give you examples of how we can behave in a way that is fair for everyone when working in a group. Write learners' ideas on the board (e.g. making sure everyone has a chance to speak, taking turns, sharing materials, etc.).

Once you have several ideas on the board, put learners into groups and ask each group to choose one of the ideas. Ask the group to make a poster explaining their example of how we can behave in a way that is fair for everyone when working in a group.

## Promoting social inclusion

### FEELING COMFORTABLE

When learners work on group tasks and projects in class, begin by displaying the picture shown here on the board. Ask learners what they can see, and what it makes them think of. Next, explain that different people have different needs, and that we should make sure everyone is included and has what they need to feel comfortable.

Next, ask learners to think about the group task they are going to work on, and invite them to tell their group what they need to feel comfortable. For example, some learners might need help with writing, or extra time, or a fidget toy (a small toy to hold in the hand) to help them feel comfortable. Encourage learners to think about how they can help each other to feel comfortable.



## Encouraging collaborative approaches

### OUR JIGSAW

When working on group tasks or projects relating to sustainability, give each group a set of jigsaw pieces (one for each learner) that fit together. Tell learners that their jigsaw piece represents what they are bringing to the group or contributing to the task. Ask them to describe it in a few words (e.g. *My jigsaw piece is colouring in and sticking paper* / *My jigsaw piece is helping with ideas*). Explain that by the end of the task, each group's jigsaw pieces should all fit together. During the task, ask learners to connect their jigsaw pieces together in their group when they contribute to the project. At the end of the task, emphasise how everyone has worked together in order to complete the task and the jigsaw.

## Acting as a global citizen

### WORLD LINKS

When learners encounter different countries in the coursebook, ask them to think about what they have in common with people from this country. Elicit ideas, and write these on the board (e.g. 'We have a similar climate.' or 'We drive on the same side of the road.').

Next, ask learners to draw a picture of themselves in the middle of a piece of paper, and to draw a picture on one part of the paper showing one of the connections they have identified. Display learners' drawings on the wall and make time for learners to add to them as they go through the course, identifying things they have in common with people from different countries around the world.

## Holding self and others to account

### WHY I DID THIS

After learners have completed a sustainability task or project, invite them to explain to you what they did to complete the task, and to explain why they chose to do what they did.



## Promoting a culture of peace and non-violence

### PEACEFUL CLASSROOM

When learners work together on group tasks and projects, begin by explaining that sometimes people disagree, and that disagreement is okay if we respond kindly and respectfully. Write the words 'Peaceful Classroom' on the board, and invite learners to brainstorm ideas of what they should and should not do when people disagree. Examples might be, 'I should speak calmly', 'I should listen carefully', 'I should try to understand', 'I shouldn't shout', 'I shouldn't hit others', etc.

Ask learners to create a poster of their ideas to display in the classroom, and refer to this when you notice disagreements or conflicts arise.



## Taking action towards a sustainable future for all

### PLEDGES POSTERS

After discussing sustainability solutions and actions in class, invite learners to think about what positive actions they themselves can take. Elicit or explain the meaning of 'pledge' (a serious or formal promise), and have learners choose an action that will be their pledge. Next, ask learners to design and make a poster, with their pledge written at the top, and a picture of themselves honouring their pledge (i.e. doing the action they pledged to do).