

Land Ethic Worksheet

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A. The Ethical Sequence

1. How does AL define “an ethic” ecologically and philosophically?
2. Currently, our primary relationship to the land is _____

B. The Community Concept

3. We have ethics because we are members of a _____
4. According to AL, that community needs to embrace which four things?
5. How are we currently destroying these four members of our community?
6. According to AL, we need to change the way we see our relationship to the land from what to what?
7. What’s the problem with the first kind of relationship?
8. “Each recession of plant types bred erosion; each increment to erosion bred a further recession of plants.” What does this mean? When did it occur in the context of the paragraph? Is it still occurring?
9. How does plant succession steer the course of history?

C. The Ecological Conscience

10. How does AL define conservation?
11. Why is Wisconsin’s topsoil slipping seaward? Why is this a problem?
12. What is the primary motivation for most farmers? Why is this dangerous?
13. What is the danger of a farmer “who clears the woods off a 75 percent slope, [and] turns his cows into the clearing...?”
14. “Obligations have no meaning without conscience, and the problem we face is the extension of the social conscience from people to land.” What does this mean?
15. “No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections and convictions.” Give examples of this from recent history.

D. Substitutes for a Land Ethic

16. What is the problem with looking at the land only in terms of economic value?
17. Why should we not kill mountain lions that show up near populated sections of the Bay Area?
18. What biotic communities are considered of little economic worth? Why should we preserve them?
19. What should landowners believe and do regarding the land they own?
20. What's the problem with asking the federal or state governments to care for land?

E. The Land Pyramid

21. What creates in us a need to construct an ethical system?
22. Define the biotic pyramid. Where does man fit into this?
23. How do food chains fit into this pyramid?
24. What is the trend of evolution regarding the biota? Is this good or bad? Why?
25. What does AL mean when he refers to circuits? Why isn't the circuit closed?
26. What is the danger of change?
27. How does AL define fertility? Why is soil becoming less fertile? (two reasons) Why is this dangerous? Why does he call this "erosion"?
28. How is water part of the energy circuit and what is happening to this circuit?
29. What about the "pioneering period" misleads us?
30. How does population density affect the "probability of successful readjustment"?

F. Land Health and the A-B Cleavage

31. How does AL define health and conservation in regards to land?
32. Define the A-B cleavage.
33. What group of "discontent[s]" that bear "some of the earmarks of a cult" offers hope regarding a truly biotic approach to biotic farming? (
34. What metaphor does AL use to discuss the "marvelous advances in technique" regarding farming? What is the dangerous implication here?
35. What does Robinson mean in his words to Tristram?

G. The Outlook

36. How can we learn to have “love, respect and admiration for land”?
37. Aside from this class, what have you learned in grammar school or high school that has led you to these three attitudes? What should schools teach and how should they teach these lessons?
38. What courses should you study in college, according to AL?
39. What is the “key-log” that must be moved? What does this all mean?
40. Explain the notion that “the bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill and faith rather than on investments of cash.”

Essay Assignment

This is suggested as a semester-end assignment after students have studied all the foundational documents from your class.

In this essay you will form your own land ethic – one that you will take with you and put into practice long after this class is over.

To do this, first summarize & define the principles of Aldo Leopold’s land ethic by

- briefly summarizing two or three key points that you felt were the most important
- and discussing why you feel these are the most important of Leopold’s points.

Then cite the principles of your own land ethic. How should we live on the earth? To do this:

- name your principles
- explain the basis of these principles (to do this, cite from your readings, from your field trips and from your own writing and reflections)

Your paper should have at least two citations from Leopold (for the first part) and four citations from other sources (readings, field notes, news stories & your own poetry & essays).