

“EARTH IS MY HOME”

Abstract: The 22th of April is the day that unites the people who value and respect our planet. The day we demonstrate our respect and appreciation for our common home - the Earth.

Every child loves playing outside in nature. Geography classes at secondary school take this further - we study the environment of different climate zones as well as the traditions and the economy of the local population. Every year, I provide my students with the opportunity to celebrate Earth Day. In March 2017, I organised an art contest titled Earth is my home for students in Grade 6 and 10. The students had the opportunity to pick the format of their entry. The contest aimed to encourage their creativity and responsibility to the environment. There was a very positive reception to the contest and Earth Day was celebrated with a high number of entries, balloons and excitement.

It is vital that the secondary school curriculum provides the space in which the teacher can be creative, develop and build upon the geographic knowledge and behaviour of the student. One of the aims of the contest was to enhance the scientific and experience-based learning outcomes of geography as a secondary school subject.

Another key outcome was to demonstrate that studying geography equips Bulgarian students with the competencies to successfully engage in a social environment and contribute to a strong civil society.

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The 22nd of April – the day of Earth, is a very important date for everyone, who respect the nature as a place to live and prosper. On that day, we do activities, which are common for all people in the world to protect the planet. This is an opportunity for geography training and economy to have a practical impact and a social response. The Earth Day was celebrated for the first time in Bulgaria on December 14, 1930, at the initiative of the Minister of Agriculture and State Property at the time, Grigor Vassilev. The initiative enjoys broad support. In 1990, the celebration of our planet was declared international. The aim is to unite people around the world to protect the environment. In 1992 the President of the Republic of Bulgaria - Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev signed the oath in the name of the Earth. More than 30,000 Bulgarian children signed the Declaration of Power, Life on Earth. The Declaration was presented to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. Bulgaria was included in its celebration in 1993. Since then each year, our country has participated in the celebration of the Earth Day and has contributed to cleaner and healthier environment to preserve the life on the planet. The day also has colossal value and can satisfy the requirements of the northern and southern hemispheres of the Earth.

Today, when the school subject of geography and economy is concerned with the theme of sustainable development and a natural way of life, the Earth day does not stand out with a specific theme in the curriculum. Each textbook topic covers the ideas of geographic culture and behavior, but there is no focus on the actual date - April 22. As a teacher with many years of experience, I appreciate my limited opportunities to change the themes covered in my classes. Of course, there are always capable and knowledgeable students who organise events and are eager to assert their knowledge and skills. But this celebration deserves a more prominent expression with a lasting impact on all students. The aim is to encourage children to be responsible for nature.

The subject of geography and economy aims to provide basic competence and to make geographic knowledge of the surrounding space part of the common culture. The school curriculum

has a very important scientific and practical importance. The subject teaches students in responsibility towards their surrounding environment. In today's world of globalization, these competences will help them socialize more effectively. The learning process is defined as a "flow of changing states". The interaction between the teacher and the student changes, they partner and cooperate. Of course, the center of the educational process is the student with his interests and needs, but a new environment of communication is being built.

The basic organization form for geography training is still the lesson, but the percentage of the student's cognitive autonomy increases according to his / her personality. This is a niche in which teachers can show creativity and initiative. The student understands that many modern issues have geographic dimensions. Interaction between nature and society requires geographic competencies. The curriculum includes age-appropriate activities, but exercise classes in the wild are limited. As a lecturer, I am obliged to follow the curriculum where the lessons are fixed and I can not take the pupils out of the classroom without the parents' prior consent and school internal approval and organisation. To comply with the regulatory requirements, a bureaucratic procedure must be followed and I often teach with illustrations and presentations instead of nature. This service engagement limits the ability of the teacher to conduct open activities to delve into a particular subject. It would be highly beneficial for the student if the school curriculum includes at least two school lessons left open to the teacher' creativity and initiative. Those familiar with the thematic distribution of classes will remind me that there are lessons for activity and knowledge control. Yes, but they are fixed for expected results, and the student with interest in the subject complete them fast and then fall in boredom. It is difficult to balance between students with different interests and competences in geography.

In the beginning of school year I gave my students the chance to celebrate the day of Earth. The students have different levels of motivation and academic achievement, that's why I have to provoke their initiative and provide them with an alternative to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. I ran a competition titled "*Earth is my home*". With this title I wanted each of my students to explain what is the meaning of Earth for them as an individual.

My purposes are:

- To test the extent to which the geography knowledge and skills acquired at school are practicable.
- To test the level of students' geographic culture.
- To continue building values such as interest in geography, responsibility, tolerance and respect for nature and the planet.

Expected results:

- Enhancing interest geography as a subject
- Stimulating learning about geography.
- Upgrading skills in use and presentation of geographic information.
- Improving cultural competence and presentational skills through creativity.

During the competition, I engaged with a few different groups of students. With a group of six-grade students, we planned and organised additional day-to-day events. The sixth and the tenth grade students presented works that expressed their attitude to the subject. I expected them to submit drawings, posters and presentations. I was hoping for more activity on the part of the sixth grade, given their emotional and competitive spirit. From the 10th grade, I expected thematic essays with in-depth motivation.

At the beginning of March, some students from sixth grade prepared information about the hour of Earth. Earth Hour is the largest conservation initiative in the world. It is always held on the last Saturday of March from 20:30 to 21:30. The motto of Earth Hour in Bulgaria this year is: *Turn off the lights, open the eyes to the planet*. This event provoked interest and questions emerged. Students with an interest in the subject of geography and economy prepared a poster with information about the event. The overwhelming majority of students turned off the lights in their homes and appreciated the experience of not being able to rely on electricity. They realized the importance of responsible use of energy.

This event intensified the students' interest in the upcoming contest. The pupils shared ideas and changed their proposed submissions during the discussion. They formed teams and collaborated for a better performance. I made a cardboard for drawing a poster and focused their attention on where to find up-to-date information. Finding and processing information on a particular topic was not difficult for them. They proved to have impressive digital skills. The Poster was designed and presented to students during classes, and then placed in a visible place in the school corridor. Tenth grade Students did demonstrate the enthusiasm I expected but they presented three essays under the title of the competition. Georgi Borikov's essay was particularly strong with its excellent writing style and a strong personal position. It starts this way:

“Earth- my home – “[T]he heaven is the place we called home.” When we think of Earth as our home, we can say that we are very bad owners. Our home, nature, which is our source of life, is left behind. It was left to be destroyed. We do not realize that in practice we are destroying ourselves. We all strive for "paradise" – set as a primary goal in the Bible - but few people think that heaven may be on Earth.

The human population may be one of the best examples of selfishness. We are changing the habitat of the animals by changing the climate so that we can have a place to build massive concrete-glass buildings where we can live, kill animals to eat them, or make clothes from their skins because it is "so modern" . The irony is that, in fact, to keep our houses and flats clean, we pollute nature by producing the harmful chemicals contained in cleaning products and dumping their waste into nature. And we do not realize that nature actually does not need us, but we need it. So we have to try to keep it before it's too late. “

The six-class students responded with greater enthusiasm. They submitted presentations showing their attitude to planet Earth and our future. They very much pointed out the hot problems for the protection of the land and the consequences of industrialization without control. They call for a personal example - plant a tree, get off the car, ride a bicycle, go “bio”, eat healthy.

They drew the symbol of the Earth, which is intended to induce humanity to be more attentive to the fragile and vulnerable environment of the planet Earth. Announced in 1971 on the initiative of Gaylord Nelson before the UN General Assembly.

The symbol of the day is the green Greek letter Θ on a white background



Appeal:



The best school projects can be seen on the school website, so that each student, parent, and teacher can understand our students views on nature.

Following the call for a personal example, we decided to plant trees and flowers in the courtyard of the school. We chose two plants. Magnolia as an example of highest level of aristocracy among trees and bushes that have hardly changed because they have been perfect from their onset. They can withstand drought and love sunshine.

We were anonymous in planting roses. The Bulgarian rose is a symbol of grace, fragrance and tradition. On April 22, with a group of students, we prepared a place in the school courtyard where we planted magnolia and roses. This was very interesting and exciting. Some of the students had helped their parents and they knew how to plant trees. In class, we talk about plants, but this was the time to practice what we learn. It was really exciting to plant magnolia and hear how student from six great repeat their parents words. I remembered a proverb: "If you are thinking about one day ahead- take food! If you think years ahead – plant a tree. If you think hundred years ahead – educate your children."

A culminating moment of the celebration was sending student messages into the sky above Sofia. The students had balloons with helium and markers for writing. There was a lot of excitement - some painted smiling people and suns, others wrote messages, such as: "Earth is in our hands; Our future belongs to us; I love my planet; I am an earth-lover; Earth is my home; I love Bulgaria" and others. All students put a piece of themselves in the message. When everyone was ready with their messages, they released the balloons in the sky under the bell-shaped call – "Earth is my home!" A colorful palette of colors rose above the schoolyard and was spontaneously applauded. This was how our celebration of Earth was officially over.

There is a remaining question – how would the people who found our message react? Would it be a provocation from us to us as inhabitants of the Earth? The children from the twenty first century making an appeal for responsibility to our planet, our present and future.

Now is the moment to analyze this activity.

All students worked actively and all objectives of the competition were achieved. With this celebration, we proved that the subject of geography and economy enable our children to be part of their social environment and build a strong civil society.

The majority of students have competences to interpret geographic information from different sources and to present it in different forms.

The learning process help students identify interrelationships between lessons and apply their knowledge through creative tasks that contribute to the formation of geographic culture in the society and more responsible citizens of the planet.

When teachers and students work together to develop competences related to the planet Earth, geography of nature and geography of the farm, they can benefit from more freedom for teacher's activities. The successful outcomes will be shared by pupils, teachers and parents. Flexibility and freedom of choice for learning expressions would equip the geography teacher with more tools to develop the students' geographic culture.

In 2017 the International Earth Day Network launched a global campaign to increase knowledge and literacy by 2020 under the slogan: "*Enhancing Environmental and Climate Knowledge*". Be part of this campaign!

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