



**Religions** Ideas common to all and examples taken from all.

**Outcomes** By the end of this unit you will:

- know some reasons why human beings have harmed the environment
- understand some religious beliefs about the environment
- express your own wonders and worries about the environment
- make your own action plan for the environment.

**Literacy** Summarise, use descriptive language, read and analyse stories, speak and listen in groups.

**Final task** Make a 'Wonder and Worry Wall' to show your hopes and fears about the environment. Write a personal action plan.



## The History of a Day

... and then, on the stroke of midnight, people appeared. All through the morning, and the afternoon, they just wandered around in small groups – hunting animals with spears and arrows, sheltering in caves, dressing themselves in skins. At about 18.00 hours they began to learn about seeds and manure, and so on. They started to herd and milk animals. By about 19.30 hours some people, from Egypt to North India, were living in cities.

Moses came and went at about 20.45 hours. Buddha was in India at about 22.10 hours. Jesus was around at 22.30 hours, as also, give a minute or so, were the Great Wall of China and Julius Caesar. Muhammad ﷺ was there at 23.00 hours.

At around 23.30 hours, big cities appeared in northern Europe. From about 23.45 onwards people went out from those cities, exploring their world and taking over some other countries. At about 23.58 hours they had a big war amongst themselves, and then had another big war, only 50 seconds later.

During the last minute before midnight, people invented nuclear weapons; landed on the moon; doubled the world's population; made five hundred species of animals extinct; and used up more oil and metal than in all the previous 23 hours 59 minutes put together.

It was now midnight again. The start of a new day.

Adapted from *Values and Visions* by Sally Burns and Georgeanne Lamont.

## Task 1

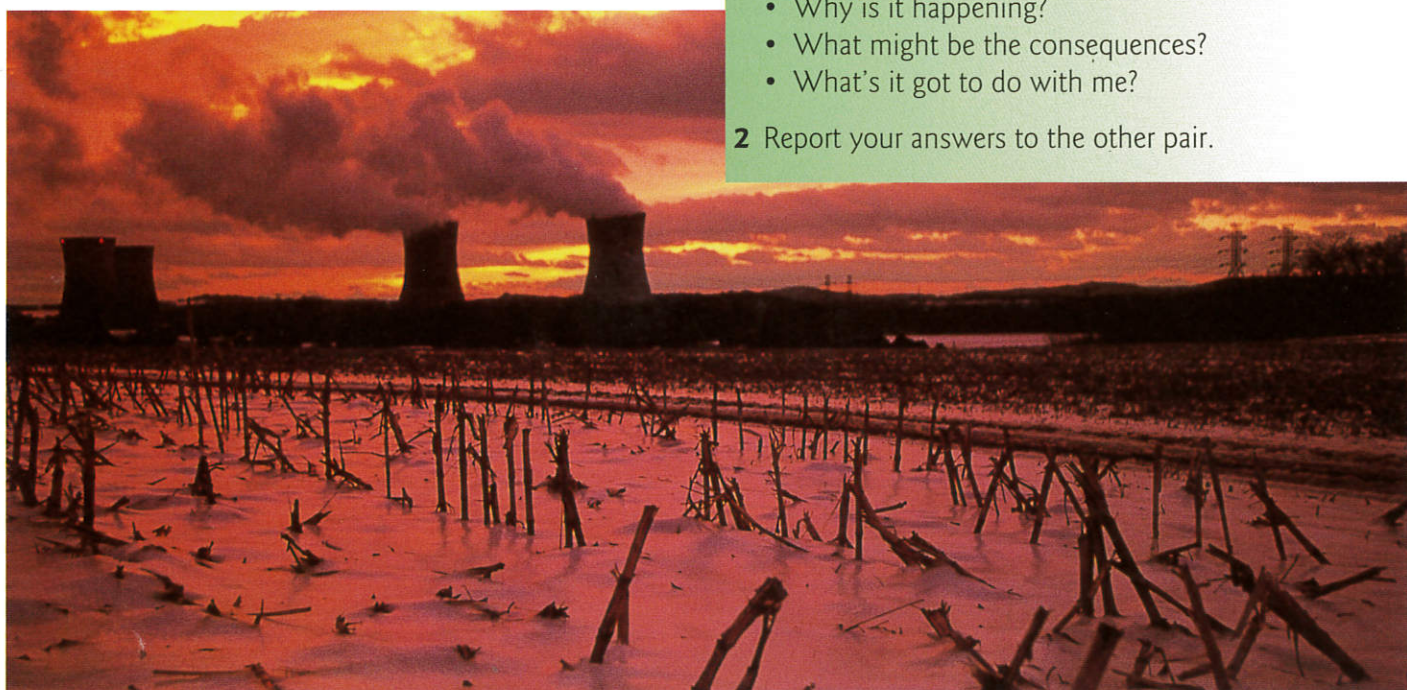
Talk about 'The History of a Day' with a partner. How does it make you feel? What is the writer trying to say? Jot down your first reactions to it. Keep these notes. You might need them for your final task.



## How are humans damaging the environment?

'The History of a Day' carries a rather scary message. Humans have long been able to affect the natural world. They have learnt to control fire and herd animals. But it is only in recent times (in the last few minutes of that 'Day') that humans have had the massive power to change or to damage our whole planet. Look back to the story – what damage have humans been doing according to these writers?

That is only a part of it. There are many other causes for concern.



### Example 1: It's getting warmer. Why?

All around the Earth is a blanket of gas, which keeps us alive. This is the Earth's atmosphere. It lets in just the right amount of energy from the Sun for life to exist. It lets out just the right amount of energy to stop us overheating. But the blanket of gas is changing. In particular there is more carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

Our atmosphere is now trapping more heat inside and so the Earth is getting warmer. Most scientists believe that this 'greenhouse effect' is one cause of 'global warming'. Global warming could cause the climate to change so there will be more droughts in some places and more floods in others.

### Task 2

Work in fours, looking at the following examples of environmental problems. Two of you take Example 1, two of you take Example 2.

1 Write your answers to the four questions below. You could use the information on pages 86–87, plus your own knowledge, or you could do further research on the internet.

- What is happening?
- Why is it happening?
- What might be the consequences?
- What's it got to do with me?

2 Report your answers to the other pair.

Here are some of the reasons why the atmosphere is changing:

- **Power stations** burn oil and coal to make electricity, which releases CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere.
- **Fumes** from factories, cars, lorries and planes add to the effect.
- **Burning rainforest** releases CO<sub>2</sub> just as a power station does but at the same time this gets rid of one of the very things that could help to solve the problem. Trees live off CO<sub>2</sub>. They absorb it and turn it back into oxygen. The rainforest acts as the Earth's lung, except that, unlike human lungs, this one breathes in CO<sub>2</sub> and breathes out oxygen.

### Example 2: It's a load of rubbish! Why?



In the UK most of the rubbish that you put in your dustbin – your juice can, your crisp packet or your plastic bag – finishes up at a landfill site like the one shown in this photo. The sites are lined and covered with earth to try to stop the POLLUTION from seeping out. Once they are filled up, the sites are then landscaped in an attempt to make them more attractive. But we still don't know the longer-term effects of all this rubbish on the environment.

Why is there so much rubbish?

- In wealthy countries like ours, people are consuming more and more each year.
- We choose highly packaged goods for their appearance and convenience.
- People find it easier to throw things away than to recycle them. Britain recycles less than almost every other country in Europe.
- It is often cheaper to replace broken goods than to repair them.

### Task 3

- 1 In a group, collect pictures to show either the environment at its best or the environment at its worst. You could look in newspapers, magazines or on websites of environmental groups.
- 2 Make a group decision about which are the five best examples for each category. Paste these ten pictures on to a poster.
- 3 Agree a group statement about why you have chosen these examples and write this statement underneath your poster.
- 4 Give a talk to the class, using your poster.

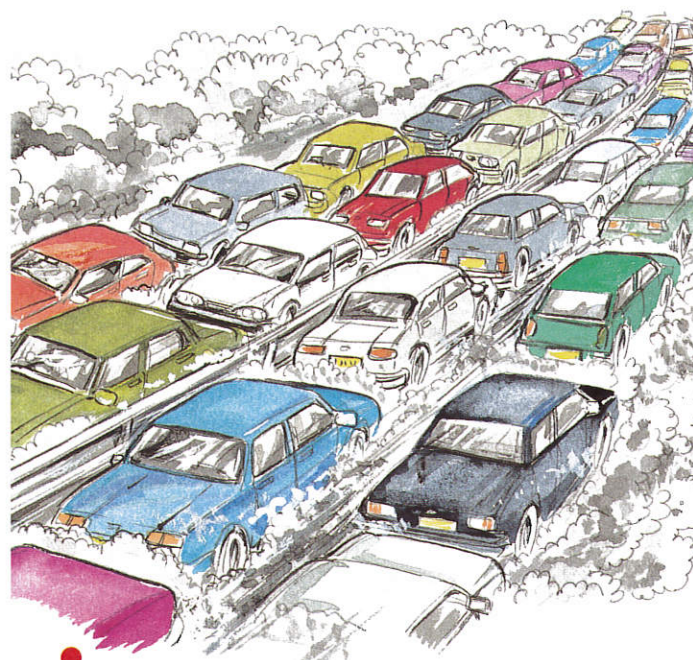


## Why are humans damaging the environment?

To tackle the two problems highlighted on pages 86–87 we need to do more than just worry. We need to understand the bigger problems that lie behind them. Maybe if we could do something about those, then...



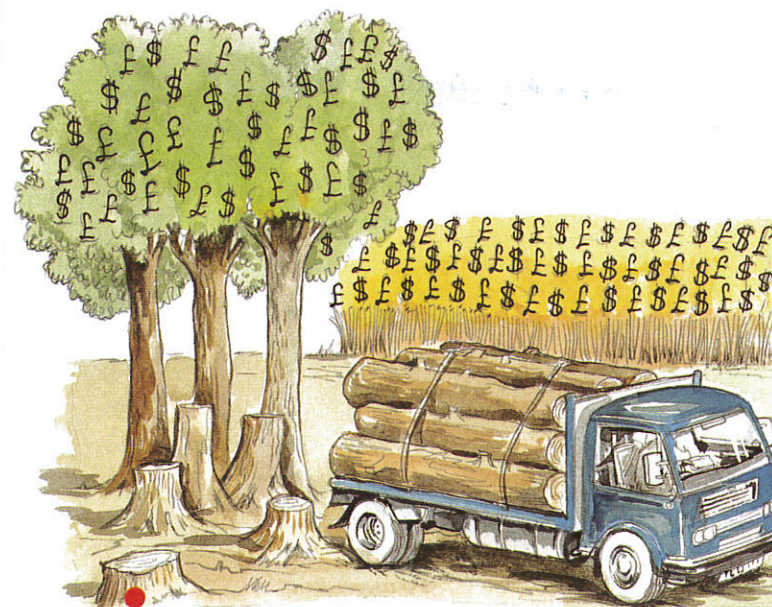
**A Population** In 1900, the world population was one billion. In 2000, it was six billion. More people means more demands on the planet.



**B Technology** has made life better for many people but its effect on the environment has not always been considered.



**C Consumerism** In the rich countries, people want more comforts and more luxuries. They want different foods and leisure goods. This uses more resources to make them, more factories and lorries and planes to supply them and more rubbish to throw away.



**D Poverty** In many of the poorer countries of the world, people have to harm the environment just to survive. For example, rainforests are cleared so that the land can be used to grow crops to sell to rich countries.



**E Attitudes** People have not thought of the Earth as a very special place to be treasured and respected.

### Task 4

Write each of the five reasons (A–E) on a separate card.

- Look back to pages 86–87. Which of the reasons help to explain the two problems?
- Arrange the five reasons in a circle round a large sheet of paper. Add lines and make notes to show how these reasons are connected.
- Put the five reasons in order of priority. Which would you tackle first?
- Which of them do you think it is easiest to do anything about? Explain your choice.
- 'We should all just give up and let people do what they want to the environment. There is nothing we can do to make it better.' Write a paragraph to explain whether you agree or disagree with this statement.



## ● How can we change our attitude to the environment?

If the Earth were only a few feet in diameter, floating a few feet above a field somewhere, people would come from everywhere to marvel at it. People would walk around it, marvelling at its big pools of water, its little pools and the water flowing between the pools. People would marvel at the bumps on it and the holes in it, and the different areas on it. And they would marvel at the very thin layer of gas surrounding it and at the water suspended in the gas. People would marvel

at all the creatures walking around the surface of the ball, and at the creatures in the water, and at the green vegetation growing on the surface. The people would declare it as

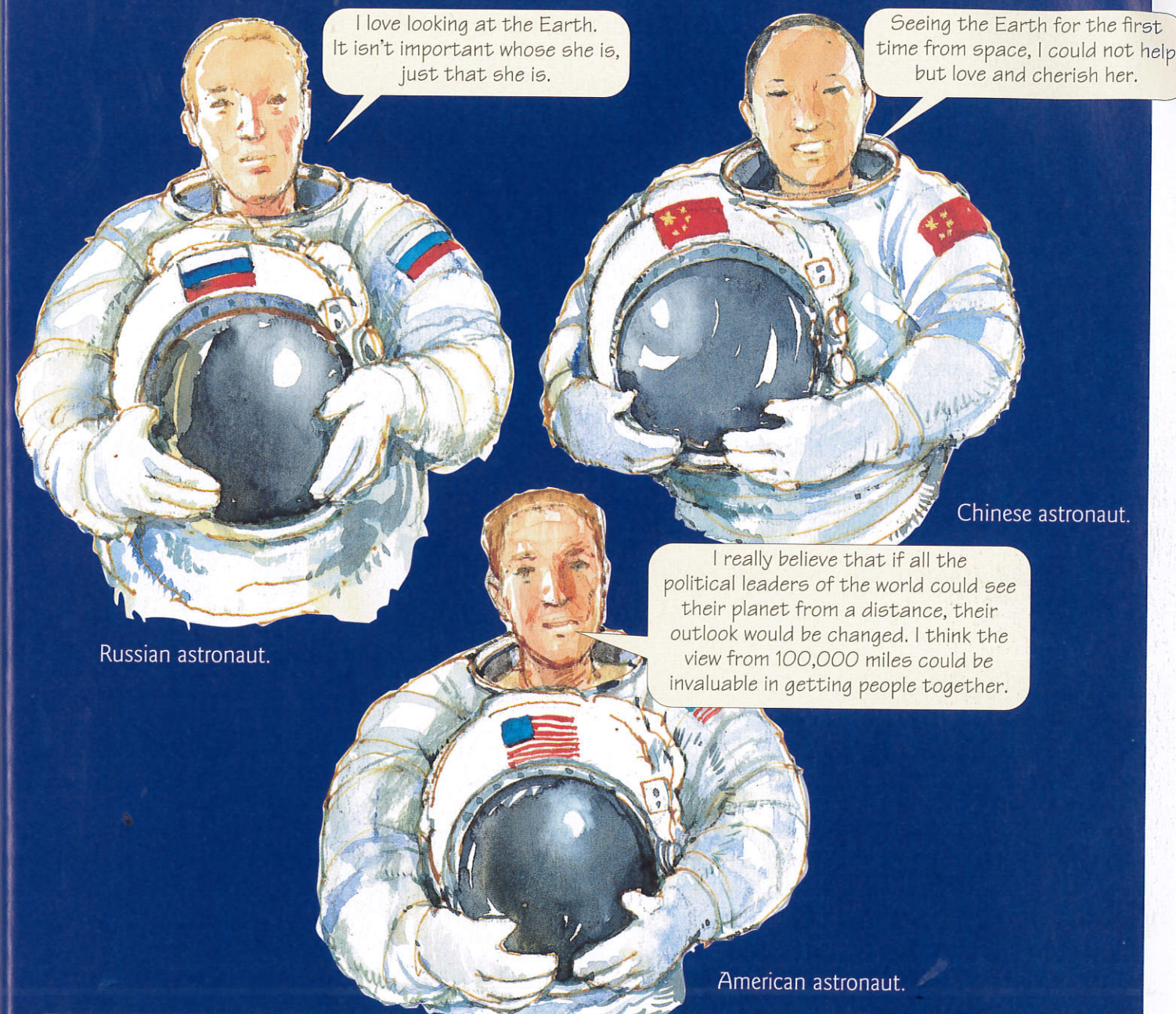
SACRED, because it was the only one, and they would protect it so that it would not be hurt. The ball would be the greatest wonder known and people would come to pray to it, to be healed, to gain its knowledge, to know its great beauty, and to defend it with their lives because they would somehow know that their lives, their own roundness, could be nothing without it. If

the Earth were only a few feet in diameter.

'If the Earth were small' by Olaf Skarsholt.



Some people have had the kind of experience that Skarsholt talks about.



### Task 5

Discuss the passage on page 90 with a partner. What is the writer saying about people's attitude to the world? Here are a few clues:

- Look at how many times the word 'marvel' is used in the first half. Why do you think this is?
- Write the word 'sacred' in the centre of a large piece of paper. Write around it any other phrases, words or features used by the author that show the earth is sacred, for example: 'people would come to pray to it'.



## Task 6

In pairs, choose four sayings each from F–M.

- a) Answer, in one sentence, the question that follows each saying.  
b) Share your answers with your partner. Keep your answers for stage 2 of the final task.

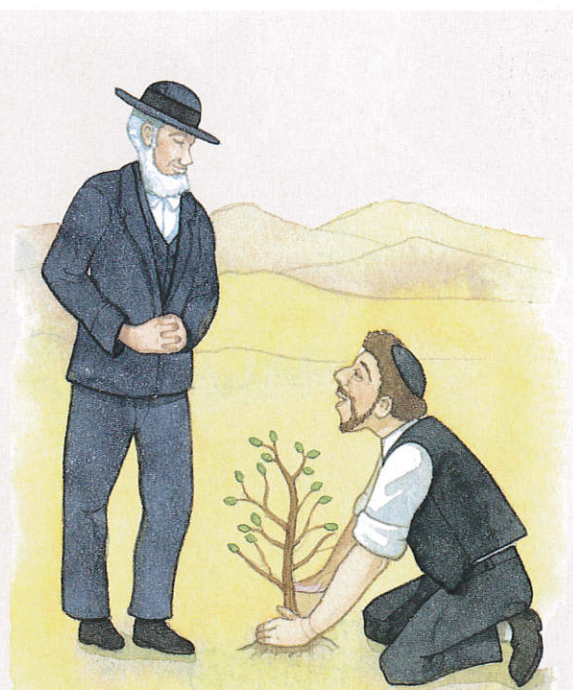
### ● Can religion help us to change our attitude?

Some people think a religious viewpoint is also very important. On pages 92–93 are eight different religious sayings about the environment and how we should treat it.

**F**

A wise rabbi was walking along a road when he saw a man planting a tree. The rabbi asked him, 'How many years will it take for this tree to bear fruit?' The man answered that it would take seventy years. The rabbi asked, 'Are you so fit and strong that you expect to live that long and eat its fruit?' The man answered, 'I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted for me. So I will do the same for my children.'

A Jewish tale.



Why was the man planting the tree?

**G**

When I look up at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
At the moon and the stars you have set in place.  
What is frail mortal, that you should be mindful of him,  
A human being, that you should notice him?  
Yet you have made him little less than a god,  
Crowning his head with glory and honour.  
You make him master over all that you have made,  
Putting everything in subjection under his feet.  
All sheep and oxen, all the wild beasts,  
And everything that moves along ocean paths.  
Lord, our sovereign,  
How glorious is your name throughout the world.

Psalm 8, a song from the Bible that is important to both Christians and Jews.

What did the writer of Psalm 8 think was so amazing about God?

**H**

If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a field,  
and men and beasts and birds eat from it,  
all of it is charity on his part.  
The world is green and beautiful and God  
has appointed you his stewards over it.

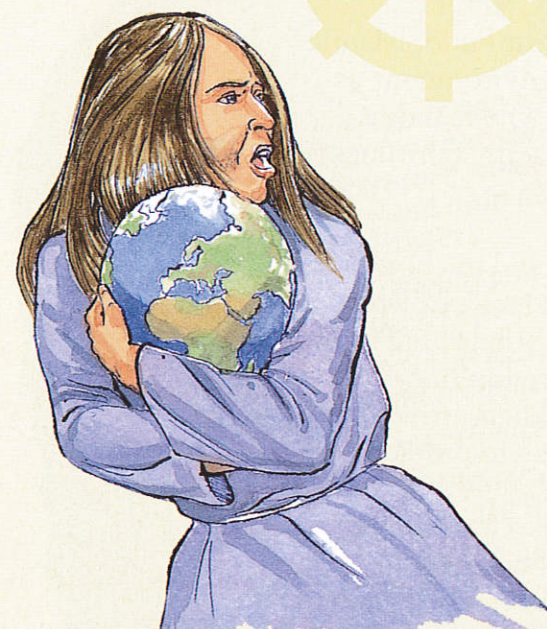
Words of the prophet Muhammad ﷺ.  
A steward is someone who looks after or is  
trusted to care for something.

What should people do for the earth?

**I**

Just as with her own life a mother shields from hurt  
her own, her only child – let there be love for all the  
universe in all its heights and depths and breadth.

A Buddhist meditation.



How should we feel about the environment?

**J**

God lives in every corner of existence.  
Therefore the whole creation is sacred.

From Hindu sacred writings.

Why should we look after the environment?

**K**

By God's will the Lord has created the creation  
and watches over all.  
God's light pervades all creation.

From Sikh sacred writings.

Where can we find God?

**L**



This we know: the Earth does not belong to man,  
man belongs to the Earth. All things are connected  
like the blood that connects us all. Man did not  
weave the web of life, he is merely a strand of it.  
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Chief Seattle in a letter to the US President, 1855.  
Native Americans believe in spiritual forces which  
bind every part of nature together – land, animals  
and people.

Why is the earth important to humans?

**M**

The planet is a gift from God and therefore not to  
be exploited. We must be aware of the  
consequences of our actions.

Pope John Paul II.

Why should we take care of the environment?

## Task 7

Match each of the sayings (F–M) to one of these key ideas.

- a) Celebration – the environment is so amazing it should fill us with worship and wonder.  
b) INTERDEPENDENCE – all parts of the environment (including us) are connected and we should live as if we are interdependent.  
c) STEWARDSHIP – we are given responsibility to care for the Earth for coming generations, so they can enjoy it.



## What can we do about the environment?

In the last minute of 'The History of a Day' (see page 85), in its final seconds, people have begun to realise what is happening to the environment. Many non-religious groups (such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace) have led the way in trying to protect the environment and protesting against those who damage it. Many religious groups, such as Christian Aid, CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) and the Tear Fund, Islamic Relief and Tzedek, have also campaigned to protect the environment as part of their campaign against poverty. Some religious people feel that protecting the environment is the most important issue facing our times.

### Example 1: The Chipko movement

In 1730, in the Rajasthan region of India, a local ruler wanted to chop down trees as fuel for his kilns. He sent his men with their axes to an area where a group of Hindus had taken a vow never to take life. This included life in the natural world and especially trees. Because they also believed in non-violence, they would not fight. As the woodcutters and soldiers arrived, the people – 363 men, women and children – hugged their trees to protect them. They were all killed.

This story inspired a group of women to start the Chipko movement in 1973. It still uses a form of non-violent struggle. 'Chipko' comes from a word meaning embrace and the women link hands around trees to prevent them from being felled.



A supporter of the Chipko movement.

### Task 8

Environmental groups often have symbols that show what they believe in.

Draw a symbol for the Chipko movement that shows their key beliefs.

### Example 2: Ten environmental commandments

In the 1980s, some young Jews and Christians wrote these ten environmental commandments.

- 1 I am the Lord your God who has created heaven and earth. Know that you are my partners in creation; therefore, take care of the air, water, earth, plants and animals, as if they were your brothers and sisters.
- 2 Know that in giving you life, I have given you responsibility, freedom and limited resources.
- 3 Steal not from the future; honour your children by giving them a chance of long life.
- 4 Implant in your children a love of nature.
- 5 Remember that humanity can use technology, but cannot recreate life that has been destroyed.
- 6 Set up pressure groups to prevent future catastrophes.
- 7 Throw out all arms which destroy for ever the foundations of life.
- 8 Be self-disciplined in the small details of your life.
- 9 Set aside time in your weekly day of rest to be with the world rather than to use the world.
- 10 Remember that you are not the owner of the land, just its guardian.

### Task 9

- 1 Look at the eighth commandment. Make a list of ways in which you can be 'self-disciplined in the small details of your life' so that you help the environment. For example, turning off lights when they're not needed.
- 2 The words 'responsibility', 'freedom' and 'limited resources' are used in the second commandment. Look up these words in a dictionary. In your own words, explain what the second commandment means.
- 3 With a partner, choose three commandments which you think are particularly important if the future is going to be any better than the past for the environment. You could look back to pages 88–89 where you examined causes of environmental problems.



## Final task

## So ... what are we doing to the environment?

## Stage 1: Make a Wonder and Worry Wall

**Wonder** will describe feelings of amazement at the beauty of the world.

**Worry** will express anxieties about what is happening to the world.

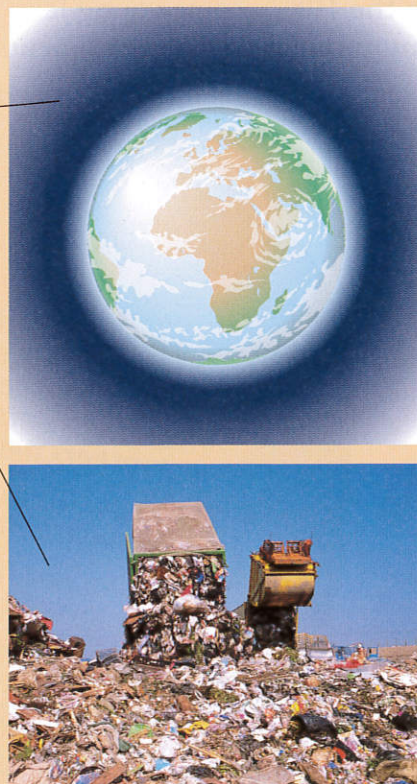
Look back through the unit and show your response to what you have learned by making a list of words that describe your feelings about the earth.

For example: beauty  
threatened

Organise all your words in columns headed **Wonder** and **Worry**. Pick two words from Wonder and two words from Worry and write a sentence for each to explain why you chose them.

As a class, you could write your words on sticky labels or Post-its and make a Wonder and Worry Wall of the labels to go with the title: 'The world is ...'

Your sentences could be added to the display. What about word processing them?



## Stage 2: Draw up an action plan

Remember 'The History of a Day' (page 85)? We have now started the new day. We can't put the clock back! But we can still take action. The future is ours. What can we do to make sure that the future for the environment is better than the recent past? And how can religion help us?

- 1 Think back to the work you have done in this unit.
  - a) List four mistakes that have been made in the past that should not be repeated.
  - b) List four things that human beings need to do before time runs out.
- 2 a) Choose three religious ideas from this unit that you think are particularly helpful in encouraging people to respect the environment. Look back at the quotes on pages 92 and 93.
  - b) Choose just one idea from a) then write a paragraph about how this religious idea you have chosen is relevant. Be specific! How might this idea
    - change people's attitudes
    - encourage them to take action
- 3 Here is a Native American story:

Once there was a great forest fire, and all the animals and birds rushed to escape. Hummingbird went to the river, and collected a drop of water. The other birds laughed. 'What are you doing?' they asked. She replied, 'I'm doing what I can.'

List two things that you can do to help. What would be your drops of water?

