

The outline for this essay emphasized a 'creative' approach- I shuddered in the face of this task! This isn't a concept I'm hugely familiar with. Creativity was never something I could claim credit for. One might call me a cynical empiricist but I prefer the notion of an analytical observer! It is imperative for us to judge the matters we take the time to note. Passive observation is a crime that we cannot allow ourselves commit, especially in relation to planet earth.

I am a student of history and politics so I draw conclusions according to factual information constantly. Everyday is subject to factual information for all of us though- what time is the bus at? What is in my fridge for breakfast? What time is my next class at? Our whole existence is based around conscious decisions we make in relation to these factual circumstances. However, this seems to only be the case in certain circumstances. We don't react with the same immediacy when we think of things like recycling or saving energy. Their consequences are beyond our immediate concern.

Here are a few thoughts. What about when a baby cries out for food, you feed it. When the dog bounds around the house practically running up the walls, you bring him for a walk. When you are feeling under the weather you might take a rest, put your feet up. But what about a planet that is in need of a rest? What about a planet that needs to exercise itself. What about a planet that is being starved. This is what the International Year of Planet Earth is about for me. It's about listening to our planet. It's about doing something about what our planet has to tell us. It is simply about giving our planet back what it has given us- life.

What about the circumstances that dictate the life of the planet? We need to think about our role as humans here- in extraction, in preserving, in our role as agents in nature. This year I'm taking an elective called "The Global Environment and Climatology". I have environmental facts coming out of my ears at the moment! Considering the limited scope of this essay and the prevalence of facts in my university courses, I implore you to understand why I am not going to use this forum to state the facts once again. The facts are out there and we're all vaguely familiar with them. I could ream off pieces of information all night but I want to focus on what makes the current crisis our planet is dealing with real? We need to use our imagination to place these facts in context. There is a strong interplay between the imagination and reality. We need to help each other in realizing the value of both.

What we are in for if the current trends in planetary exploitation continues is beyond anything that we will have seen before. If we do happen to catch a glimpse of it, we know we have reacted too late. We hear about cities

disappearing underwater, polar bears drowning, animals liable to extinction, environmental refugees- the list is endless. There are endless suggestions about adaptation and mitigation measures. This is where we are asked to start using our imaginations because the reality of these potential outcomes can never be realized. It is pivotal that we use our imagination at this stage to understand the extent of the impending consequences and prevent them from ever occurring.

Creativity exists in a different part of the brain; a part that someone very close to me still taps into everyday. His creative streak is enviable, but so too are his skills with the Playstation! His passion for mythical creatures and plastic wrestlers is something I have never seen equalled. Meet Killian, my eight year brother.

We use both our imagination and our methodical thinking to understand the potential outcomes of a planet that is abused; floods, droughts, storms, disease, and inevitably death. It doesn't always require imagination as these things are currently happening in some form but its grasping the threat they pose to both us and our planet in the future that requires us to think bigger. I decided what I would do was share some facts with Killian and encourage him to use his imagination to engage in some meaningful dialogue with his big sister. The following is the very insightful conversation that followed.

We sat down and I told him I wished to have a little chat. He was immediately suspicious but as a young boy whose teacher's major complaint is that he never stops talking, he wasn't too reluctant for a chance to babble on!

I began by trying to figure out the extent of his knowledge on the environment and how it all works. Sadly 'google earth' is it- "deadly" is in fact his word to describe it! I ask him about the weather and he tells me that in Ireland it is "very cold nearly everyday but sometimes you think it could be sunny. Sunny is my favourite weather because you get to go out and play and go to places and ride your bike and all".

Considering his penchant for the sun, like most other people, I ask him can people affect the weather and if they could, should they interfere? "No they can't but if they could they should leave it cos it wouldn't be fair to people who like winter". I'm pleased he is showing such consideration for people like myself who have a mild aversion to anything over ten degrees celcius! He tells me it doesn't need to rain but it does as summer is for sunny weather and winter is for cold. He carries on to disclose the fact that he would love to go to France as it looks nice and he thinks its sunny. His favourite animal is a dog. He had never heard of extinction and couldn't tell me what the environment actually was. He told me that cars

had no effect on the environment. He didn't know where the heating and electricity for our house came from. He believes that nothing is wrong with the planet. Interestingly though when I asked him what was the worst thing he could imagine happening to our planet he replied, "the largest thunderstorm in the world that would destroy all the cities and towns."

Well I should definitely try and point out where I'm going with all this. I wanted Killian to think about the living things around him. I wanted him to consider the interaction between these things. Climate change demonstrates these facts clearly. I then did possibly the most unimaginative of all things- typed "explaining climate change to children" into google. Welcome Tiki the Penguin to the conversation! Along with this extremely informative creature I used some material devised by the British embassy in Brussels for the purpose of educating Belgian school children.

Firstly we went through the embassy's animations.

(<http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1158047126257>) They explained the effects that cars and electricity had on the environment. After going through them both I asked Killian was he worried about how much people used cars? "No, I don't feel scared. It's not gonna happen in years". This, you should note is from a young boy who gets dropped to and picked up from school by his mother in our family car everyday. A slightly self-interested answer indeed!

I enquired further asking him to specify when he thinks it will happen? "A long time away. I don't really think its happening" he responds. It seems that even a child with the most active of imaginations finds it difficult to fathom our impact on the planet.

I elaborated further with Tiki.

(http://tiki.oneworld.net/global_warming/climate_home.html) This presentation was a lot more comprehensive in that it was very explicit about our actions and their consequences. He seemed to think about it more this time. He agreed that it was not right for businessmen to make money if they don't care about the environment as "it won't be fair for places where it is cold". He concurred that we need to stop global warming as "it wouldn't be fair to the penguins and the polar bears...oh and all the poor people too."

The most important question I think was "What is the one thing you think we need to do to stop it?" His answer was one that we need to listen to

“Whatever you have to do”.

Even if it meant not making lots of money?

“Yes even if it meant not making lots of money. If I was a grown up I would do something about it.”

“The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world it leaves for its children”.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Theologian

Sustainability is at the heart of this debate. One shouldn't have to waste their creative energy fearing the environmental impact of our actions today. We should use our creativity to preserve the planet we have been fortunate enough to find ourselves on. We understand the role of the planet in sustaining human kind yet do we really understand the deep pressures we have put on these resources? We have reached a point where we must take note of the limited resources of the earth. We must help the planet to sustain itself, not just for our sake but for the sake of those who have benefited in the past and those who will be fortunate enough to benefit in the future. We owe it to our planet and the life it has given us.