Lesson 5 The Earth for All

Reading 1

The Differences a 1.5˚C Increase Makes

Why is 1.5°C so important when discussing the environment? Scientists use average temperature data from the period between 1850 and 1900 as a reference for the pre-industrial use of coal, oil, and gas. They then compare the average temperature of the pre-industrial period to that after industrialization, in order to measure how global temperatures have changed over time. For decades, scientists had believed that a 2°C average global temperature increase during the post-industrial period would be the limit to avoid dangerous environmental impacts. However, in 2018, scientists sounded a more urgent alarm by revising their data. They warned that if we exceeded 1.5°C of warming, this would lead to fatal consequences. Since the late 1800s, our planet has already experienced an average temperature increase of 1.1°C. We are thus rapidly getting closer to that critical point of reaching a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures, which demands immediate action to combat global warming.

1.5°C and Carbon Neutrality

To address the issue of global warming, the Paris Agreement was established in 2015, aiming to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Carbon neutrality refers to striking a balance between carbon emissions and carbon absorption from the atmosphere. Currently, it stands as an essential goal in addressing global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a key contributor to the foundation of the Paris Agreement. Recently, the IPCC has stressed the urgent need to limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. According to the IPCC 's report, exceeding even a 1.5°C increase would lead to severe environmental consequences. We would witness significant losses in backboned animals, plants, and insects. Additionally, parts of the global population would be exposed to extreme heat at least once every five years. Therefore, immediate measures are required to limit global warming to 1.5°C. These measures include significantly reducing global carbon emissions by 45% by 2030, ultimately achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Meeting this goal demands a transformation of our daily routines and habits.

Efforts to Achieve Carbon Neutrality

Many countries, cities, businesses, and organizations are committed to making the transition to renewable energy sources in order to achieve carbon neutrality in the near future. As a part of these efforts, the UN suggests we stop building high polluting facilities like power plants that burn coal. The UN also proposes the implementation of a carbon pricing system to promote investments in renewable energy. As individuals, we should actively participate in the collective effort to achieve carbon neutrality. Here are some actions we can take in our daily lives:

Reduce Your Carbon Footprint at School

We can reduce our daily carbon footprint at school in various ways. For example, we can use reusable water bottles, power off electronics when they are not in use, and take the stairs instead of using elevators. Moreover, we can raise awareness about global warming by hosting a "Green Campaign." Such a campaign would encourage students to engage in daily activities that reduce their carbon footprint at school.

Go Green with Your Food

One great option to reduce our carbon footprint is to include more vegan meals in our diet. The production of meat and dairy products demands a lot of land, water, and energy, which contributes to carbon emissions. Therefore, choosing eco-friendly foods such as whole grains, nuts, and vegan milk is an excellent alternative to animal products.

Cut Back on Time Online

The internet and digital technology are responsible for approximately 4% of the world's climate pollutants. Every online activity we engage in comes at a cost because carbon dioxide (CO2) is emitted while we are running our devices and powering networks. Therefore, we should try to spend less time online each day to minimize our carbon footprint.

Choose Sustainable Transportation

We can use public transportation—or even better, walk or ride a bike for shorter distances. If air travel is the only option for a long trip, we need to keep in mind that air travel contributes significantly to carbon pollution. Try to limit the number of times you travel by air; choose more sustainable modes of transportation to minimize your impact on the environment.

Global warming poses an urgent threat and requires immediate action. It is crucial for us to make collective efforts to prevent global warming. It is not just big corporations and international organizations that need to take action or make a difference; as individuals, we can also play our role in protecting the environment. By making conscious efforts to make sustainable choices in our daily lives, we can contribute to achieving carbon neutrality, the common goal of humanity.

Reading 2

What Art Can Do for the Environment

In 2022, two climate activists threw mashed potatoes on a glass-covered Did You Know? painting by Claude Monet. Such extreme measures were undertaken in order to turn people's attention towards climate change. The activists insisted that people be less concerned about art and more about the state of the planet. They perceived art as a symbol of luxury, detached from urgent environmental issues. However, the activists' perception of art was mistaken. Contemporary artists, in fact, have been actively raising awareness about environmental destruction and climate change through their art.

Turning Plastic into Art

Contemporary artists are creatively addressing the environmental crisis in a way that emphasizes its severity. Angela Pozzi's Washed Ashore project is a great example. The project creates sculptures of sea life using marine waste to highlight the harmful impact of plastic pollution on ocean species. Pozzi was inspired to start the project after witnessing a lot of plastic waste on a beach. For the project, she decided to use this waste as a primary medium for her artwork. The project has turned 20 tons of plastic thrown away on beaches into over 70 public artworks, including large sculptures of diverse marine animals. These visually striking sculptures vividly illustrate the damaging effects of plastic waste on oceans. What began as a personal effort to clean a beach has now become a global call to action. Her project has inspired more than 10,000 volunteers to clean their own beaches. This means that her project has encouraged collective action for a healthier planet.

Immersing Yourself in Climate Action

Arcadia Earth is another impactful art project designed to raise environmental awareness. Arcadia Earth is an art exhibition founded and designed by experiential artist Valentino Vettori. The exhibition features immersive art installations that deal with a variety of environmental issues, such as the destruction of forests, plastic use, and animal endangerment. To provide a truly immersive experience for visitors, the exhibition uses technology, including AR and VR. For example, VR technology enables visitors to encounter wildlife in their natural habitats. One of the exhibition's most captivating installations is a cave constructed from 44,000 recycled plastic bags. The number of plastic bags used in the installation represents the amount consumed by New Yorkers in just one minute. Based on objective facts and figures, the installation effectively reminds visitors of the significance of responsible behavior and consumption for environmental conservation. Vettori says that Arcadia Earth is designed to inspire people to make small changes to protect the planet's future because there is no "plan B."

In sum, art has played a significant role in raising social awareness and inspiring people to take action. Artists use their creativity to engage the public in conversations about environmental conservation. If artists didn't use their creativity to address climate change, we might not fully understand the seriousness of environmental pollution. Their work reminds us that art can be a powerful force for the positive transformation of our planet.