Building Resilience at Home

What does "resilience" mean at the personal, social, and ecological levels?

Lesson Plan: Summary of Activity

After reading "Security, Resilience, and Community" (an excerpt on the Center's website from the preface to David W. Orr's book, *Down to the Wire*), lead a class discussion about the meaning of "resilience" at the personal, social, and ecological levels. Brainstorm ways to increase the resilience of local communities. You may want just to read the essay yourself for background or ask your students to read it, depending on their cognitive and reading levels. You can find the essay at **www.ecoliteracy.org/essays/security-resilience-and-community**.

Grade Levels: 9-12

Estimated Time: 1-2 class periods (50-100 minutes)

Lesson Steps

1. Introduce the concept of resilience by asking students what we mean when we remark that someone "really bounced back" after a difficult time. Record their responses.

2. Write the word "RESILIENCE" on the board. Share with the class that "resilience" on the personal level is the capacity for a person to rebound from tough times and come through without psychological damage. Rather than giving up when faced with a difficult situation, resilient people face adversity with courage and determination. Sometimes they are even emotionally stronger than they were before. Ask if they can describe a time when they or someone they know demonstrated resilience.

3. You can expand the discussion by reading an Aesop's fable, "The Oak Tree and the Reeds," as an illustration of resilience:

   An Oak that grew on the bank of a river was uprooted by a severe gale of wind, and thrown across the stream. It fell among some Reeds growing by the water, and said to them, "How is it that you, who are so frail and slender, have managed to weather the storm, whereas I, with all my strength, have been torn up by the roots and hurled into the river?" "You were stubborn," *came the reply,* "and fought against the storm, which proved stronger than you: but we bow and yield to every breeze, and thus the gale passed harmlessly over our heads."
   See Aesop's Fables >

4. Ask students to identify the conditions which help build resilience for youth their age. Record their answers on the board. Ask the class, working together, to cluster responses that are similar and give each cluster a heading. (For example, Resiliency In Action identifies broad categories of conditions for nurturing resilience: caring and support; high expectations for success; opportunities for meaningful participation; positive bonds; clear and consistent boundaries; and life skills. **Visit Resiliency in Action >**)

5. Tell students that the idea of "resilience" can also apply to large-scale systems, like ecosystems, as well as to individual people. Ecosystems that are "resilient" are able to bounce back from a disturbance, like a fire or an oil spill, although it may take a long time. A resilient ecosystem can tolerate a disruption and eventually return to a healthy state. David Orr defines large-scale resilience as "the capacity of the system to 'absorb a disturbance; to undergo change and still retain essentially the same function, structure, and feedbacks.'"

6. Ask students to identify the conditions that affect an ecosystem's resilient (e.g., the severity of the disturbance, the ecosystem's biological diversity, its state of health prior to the disturbance, and palliative measures that are taken after the disturbance). Record their responses on the board, and cluster them if there are many responses. (See step 4 above.)

7. Share with students that scientists are concerned that widespread changes in climate threaten the resilience of many ecosystems, which in turn threatens the well-being of humans. Ask them to think about fertile land areas where we grow

food, island and coastal communities that are vulnerable to rising ocean levels, and the global increase in extreme weather, and challenge them to make connections between the loss of resilience at the ecosystem level and the human-community level.

8. Some experts, like David Orr, are concluding that we can no longer count on large-scale government to protect us from these threats and that much of the work must be carried out at local and regional levels. Furthermore, he argues that society as a whole will be more resilient if we establish decentralized systems for provisioning ourselves (e.g., local food systems, energy systems, communication system, etc.). A regionalized system would be better able to bounce back from a severe disturbance in one place, such as a drought or an oil shortage. It would also be easier to repair, support the local economy, and reduce carbon emissions. Working in pairs, have students generate a chart that identifies potential positive and negative consequences of building decentralized systems.[i]

9. Ask students to brainstorm a list of ways they could collectively take action to secure local access to things that we in the U.S. consider to be our basic human rights: food, clean water, health, energy, shelter, and productive work. Use the list to formulate an action plan with students, with them taking the lead to make their community more secure.

For a printable download of this activity, click here.

---

[i] Orr describes what his community is doing to build resilience and urges local citizens to ban together to improve local and regional resilience. **See article >**