

GLOBAL ISSUE

Human life on the earth



Competences: social responsibility • global awareness
• problem solving • comparing past and present issues



Two Sustainable Development Goals, numbers 14 and 15, address the importance of protecting our natural environment for sustainable development. SDG 14, Life Below Water, tackles the issue of the world's oceans. The marine environment is threatened by overfishing and pollution has reached alarming levels. SDG 15, Life on Land, reminds us that human life depends on the earth for sustenance. Agriculture provides food and is an important economic resource. Forests are being lost to deforestation and desertification. Action is needed to preserve marine and terrestrial ecosystems and their biodiversity, both essential for sustaining life on Earth and for social and economic development.

STEP 1 Defining the issue. Read the three quotations below. Then discuss the questions which follow.

'A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.'
(Franklin D. Roosevelt)

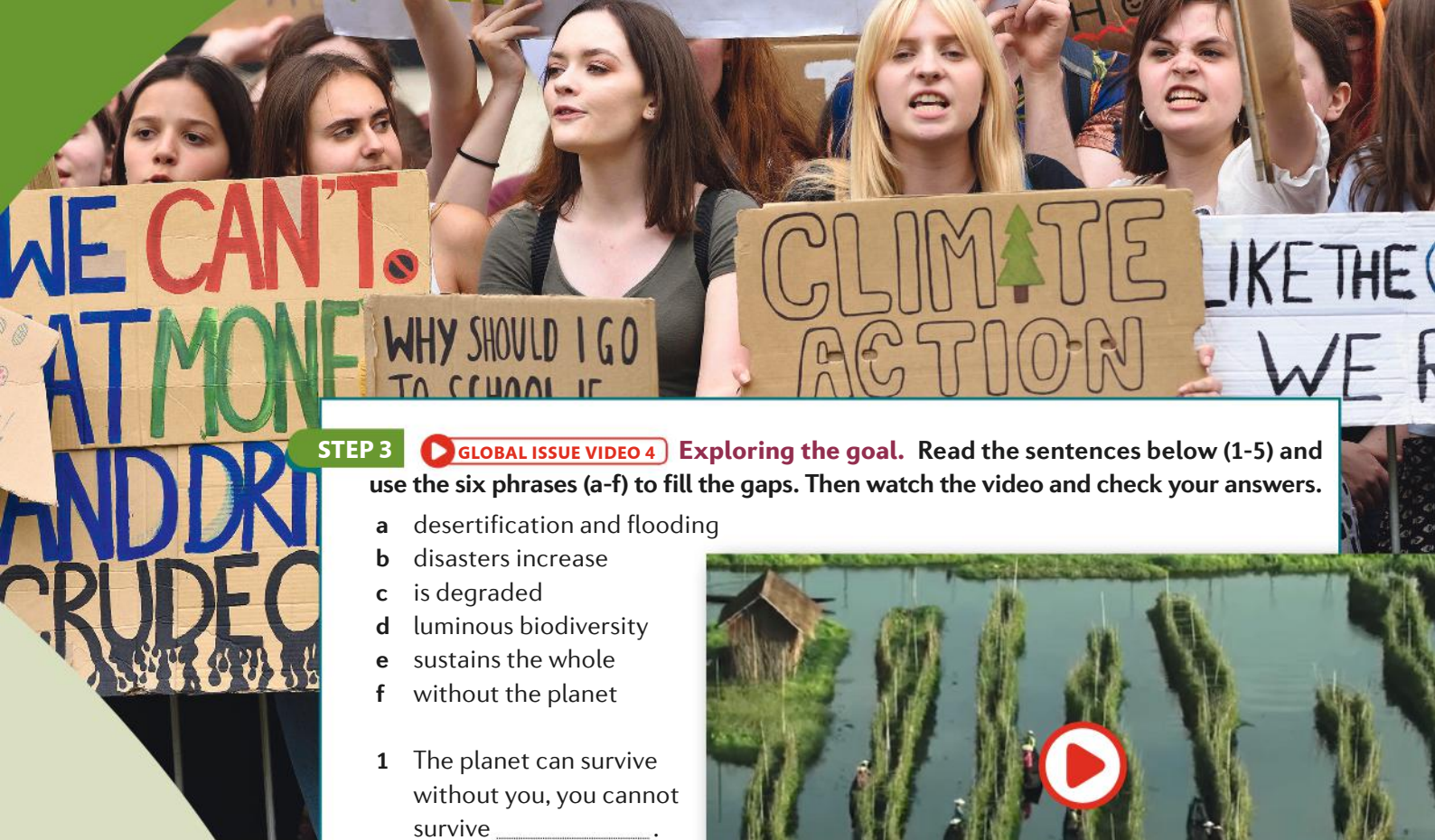
'For most of history, man has had to fight nature to survive; in this century he is beginning to realize that, in order to survive, he must protect it.'
(Jacques-Ives Cousteau)

'The Earth will not continue to offer its harvest, except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land and then take steps to destroy it for use by future generations.'
(Pope John Paul II)

- 1 How are forests described in the first quotations?
- 2 What does this suggest?
- 3 How has (or should) our attitude to nature change according to Cousteau?
- 4 What responsibility does the third quotation indicate?

STEP 2 Coleridge and respect for nature. Coleridge's Ancient Mariner is punished for his sacrilegious failure to respect nature and finally redeemed when he accepts all elements of nature as part of God's creation. The lesson that the Rime gives us is: 'He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things both great and small'.

- 1 What elements of nature does Coleridge refer to?
- 2 What aspects of SDG 14 reflect Coleridge's message?
- 3 What message is contained in both the Rime and in SDGs 14 and 15?



STEP 3



GLOBAL ISSUE VIDEO 4

Exploring the goal. Read the sentences below (1-5) and use the six phrases (a-f) to fill the gaps. Then watch the video and check your answers.

- a desertification and flooding
- b disasters increase
- c is degraded
- d luminous biodiversity
- e sustains the whole
- f without the planet

1 The planet can survive without you, you cannot survive _____.

2 Every living thing, no matter how small, _____.

3 The oceans rise and fall, _____.

4 We are displaced. Our land _____. Our seas drown in our waste. We lose our _____.

5 Fight _____. Be more resilient, more adaptive.



BE THE CHANGE

Here are some of the main targets of SDGs 14 and 15.

- End deforestation and restore degraded forests.
- End desertification and restore degraded land.
- Protect biodiversity and natural habitats.
- Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and prevent the extinction of threatened species.
- Prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

What can you do? Consider some of these suggestions and in small groups discuss them. Which of them are possible and practicable for you? Can you think of any other useful ideas? Then share your ideas with the rest of the class.

- Recycle paper, glass, plastic, metal and old electronics.
- Clean your local parks, forests and beaches. Organise your own or join an existing clean-up event to sustain the ecosystem of your local green space.
- Reduce your use of paper. Avoid printing and substitute it with electronic devices or carriers.
- Don't shop for pets! Visit your local animal shelter and adopt an animal there.
- Don't buy products tested on animals. Check the labels on the products you buy.
- Buy fish from producers that guarantee sustainable fishing or responsible farming.



Rachael Boast (1975-)

Rachael Boast is a British poet. She was born in Suffolk in 1975. She has a PhD in Creative writing from the University of St Andrews, Scotland. She has published four poetry collections: *Sidereal* (2011), winner of the Forward Prize and the Seamus Heaney Poetry Prize, *Pilgrim's Flower* (2013), shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize, *Void Studies* (2016), shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize,

and *Hotel Raphael* (2021) which includes *Silent Sea*. Her books are available from Picador. Her literary models include Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, the French poet, artist and filmmaker Jean Cocteau, and the Russian poet Anna Akhmatova.

Silent Sea (2015)

Her poem Silent Sea (2015) was selected by the former UK poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy as one of 20 original poems on the theme of climate change first published in the Guardian newspaper in May 2015 at the time of the Paris Climate Change Conference, which produced talk but little effective action. Silent Sea makes a direct reference to Coleridge's Rime, quoted as an introduction. Boast reflects on the damage done to our seas and oceans by the oil industry and specifically by leakages of crude oil polluting the marine environment.

We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea
– S.T. Coleridge

Another vessel sheds¹ the chrome
of its silver mile until a mile
meanders into three, triples again

over the reef. Nothing can breathe
5 under oil, nor register that
dark membrane's slick²

over sight³. *We were the first*
cracking the hull⁴ of the earth
open, our foolish husbandry⁵

10 a metallurgy that's brimmed⁶
with false gold too often:
we can talk and talk and talk

but on a ship⁷ in space, manned⁸
by *non-thinking from non-feeling*,
15 we say absolutely nothing at all.

- 1 **sheds**: perde
- 2 **slick**: chiazza
- 3 **oversight**: svista, errore
- 4 **hull**: guscio
- 5 **husbandry**: agricoltura/allevamento
- 6 **brimmed**: traboccato
- 7 **ship**: nave = pianeta terra
- 8 **manned**: equipaggiata



INTERACTIVE
ANALYSIS



STEP 4 Read the poem *Silent Sea* by Rachael Boast. Then do the activities.

COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION

1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 What is the structure of the poem?
- 2 Does it have a regular metre or a rhyme scheme?
- 3 What do you think the vessel (ship) sheds into the sea?
- 4 How does Boast explain the death of marine animals in the second verse?
- 5 What expression in the third verse indicates drilling for oil under the earth's surface?
- 6 What adjective in the third verse criticizes man's use of the earth's resources?
- 7 What do you think Boast is implying in the verse 'we can talk, and talk and talk'?
- 8 How does Boast describe and criticise the inhabitants of Earth in the final stanza?

REFLECT AND SHARE

- The two SDGs, 14 and 15, Coleridge's *Rime* and Rachael Boast's poem *Silent Sea*, all help us to reflect on the delicate equilibrium of nature and on the potentially harmful effects on the environment of human activity and inactivity, seen as failure to take steps to preserve and protect our planet.
- Write a short text commenting on one or more of the images below and illustrating the ideas you now have about how we can respect and foster our natural environment and why this is so essential for our future.

