

## **EARTH DAY WRITING CONTEST 2012**

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Class: 12 English – Academic year: 2011-2012

***Essay Topic: What can young Vietnamese do to improve the awareness of environmental issues in Vietnam?***

In 2005, Vietnam's Environmental Sustainability Index ranked 127th globally, after Angola, Mauritania and Libya. By 2012, Vietnam is one of the ten countries with the worst cases of air pollution, and is projected to be one of the five countries most affected by climate change. It is time the young generations started playing their crucial role in conserving the changing global environment and making an impact on popular awareness of environmental issues in this country. Young people should start making a change by first changing themselves, and then others: they must *learn, involve, and engage*.

First, young people must embrace learning as it is the only way to raise their own awareness and sense of responsibility for their small community and for the greater society. Students should peruse their textbooks, for the most essential information is in them. Rather than focusing entirely on mathematics and theoretical science subjects, they should adopt a more positive and responsible attitude towards the biological sciences, physical and human geography as well as environmental studies. Class sessions should best be research- and conference-based so that as individuals, students can gain the most thorough comprehension of facts and concepts, whereas in groups, they can actively participate in discussions and design practical projects to solve environmental problems. It is vital that, in the age of technology and environmental issues we are in today, young

people should be well-equipped with the knowledge and understanding necessary for future involvement in the protection of the Earth and its peoples. Furthermore, young teachers can instill in their younger fellows on Earth a sense of responsibility, a passion for leadership, and a strong, craving desire to act and to make an impact.

Second, young people must put their newly gained awareness into action by involving in movements and myriad green programs throughout the year. Every summer, youth groups from all over the country set out to clean local streets, pick up litter on beaches and in parks, remove pervasive advertisements on electric poles, collecting and classifying waste materials etc. Undergraduate students compete for the most efficient and practical eco-friendly designs of houses, buildings and cars, whereas there are also numerous competitions for high school and even middle school students, which have attracted hundreds of young people nationwide. But the numbers are yet to be satisfactory, and active participation can mean something much simpler than being in large organizations and taking part in national competitions: students can help influence their own neighborhood or school by calling for a change and taking the initiative in implementing it. Last year, for instance, a group of twelfth-graders at High School for the Gifted started putting additional trash cans around the school in order for everyone to classify the everyday garbage they throw away. The project attracted positive attention from students and teachers, and within the first weeks hundreds of plastic bottles could be distinguished from the rest of the garbage. Many people's attitude towards recycling was profoundly changed as a direct consequence of the event, which proved that young people *could* start making a difference. Our country calls for such enterprises and commitment from young people.

Finally, young people should engage other people in the conservation of the environment by raising awareness and imparting a sense of civic responsibility for critical issues of the community. The Earth Hour is a notable example of such group action. For one hour every year, young people the world over encourage other people to turn off their lights to save energy. Yet the original idea of the Earth Hour is to spread green thinking beyond that one-hour schedule. This year, youth activists around the country visited public schools and rode on streets to acquaint people with the event and suggest various practicable ways for them to take action on climate change, not just within the Earth Hour but for the next years and decades. The practical economic gain from those sixty minutes may be insignificant, but the lasting edifying result is incredible: people everywhere are telling one another to start taking responsibility for their own actions towards the environment. An action as effortless as turning off unused lights can lead people to the moral conviction that throwing garbage in a bin and minimizing plastic use are not ridiculous but environmentally reasonable and essential. Soon, the same people will be changing their regular light bulbs with CFL bulbs and riding bicycles to school or work. When it comes to propaganda, young people are the most effective instrument for a changed attitude.

Reading about contemporary issues, researching on the environment, discussing solutions to critical ecological questions, participating in design or essay competitions, installing trash cans and putting up green reminder stickers around the house... – there are countless things young people in this country can do to keep pace with the vigorous conservation activities which are already in full swing in many countries around the globe. By learning to think “environmentally”, taking part in green movements, raising people's awareness and changing behaviors, and at the same time urging positive attitudes and

direct actions, young people can begin taking charge of their own Earth and help protect its environment.