

## **Anonymous green heroes in the making**

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### **Abstract**

The Anonymous Heroes Project describes an intercultural citizenship project for the language classroom, based on environmental education. It aims to raise children's awareness on waste treatment and reflect on people's attitudes towards the environment. It is intended for teachers who support education for democratic citizenship and want to provide children with the set of skills needed to critique, evaluate, accept responsibility on common issues and take action.

*Keywords:* environmental education; waste treatment; education for democratic citizenship.

### **Resumen**

El proyecto Héroes Anónimos describe un proyecto intercultural y de ciudadanía acerca del medio ambiente para el aula de lenguas extranjeras. Tiene como objetivo concientizar a los niños a cerca del tratamiento de la basura y reflexionar sobre la conducta de las personas en torno al medio ambiente. Está destinado a educadores que apoyen un marco de ciudadanía democrática en la enseñanza de lenguas y que quieran proveer a los niños de un conjunto de habilidades necesarias para analizar, evaluar, asumir la responsabilidad sobre aquellas cuestiones que nos son comunes y actuar directamente sobre ellas.

*Palabras clave:* medio ambiente; tratamiento de la basura; educación para la ciudadanía democrática.

### Preview

**Level:** 5th and/or 6th form at primary school

**Language competence:** A1 (Common European Framework of Reference)

**Age of students:** 10–12

**Type of project:** Intercultural citizenship project in the language classroom, CLIL

**Theme:** Environmental education, waste reduction

**Estimated time:** Approximately two months (see chart with timeline under Instructional plan)

### Summary

This proposal describes an intercultural citizenship and environmental project which distinguishes between three different levels of analysis, namely the community, the school and the family which, in a way, joins the community again in the form of a loop. These three contexts are linked together in the language classroom through an array of different tasks such as watching a video and sorting trash, including as final outcomes two proposals for children to take action (*My extended network* and *Going digital*). A funny character, the Green Hero, will guide children throughout the development of this project in which they will begin by identifying and critically analysing green crimes, taking a close look at other people's attitudes towards the environment, both within their local contexts and globally. They will then analyse and evaluate their own waste sorting habits, both at school and at home. Finally, children will plan and develop ways of protecting the environment, integrating different skills and knowledge and developing a group identification as *Anonymous Green Heroes*. Overall, this project helps children see themselves in relation to others, triggering a way of thinking and acting that goes beyond personal concerns, deconstructing stereotypes, assuming collective responsibility for environmental issues and seeking people's welfare.

### From Theory to Practice

If we consider the school as a micro-society and every student as a citizen with agency, no matter their age, the inclusion of intercultural citizenship education in the language classroom is essential. The foreign language classroom is an appropriate place to build on citizenship as long as teachers and students act on the basis of: participation, allowing people to speak up; equality, acknowledging and valuing diversity; solidarity and responsibility, promoting respect for human rights, understanding others and seeking people's welfare.

“Citizenship education provides opportunities for learners to reflect on their own values and identities in the context of the society in which they live. This is rarely possible in other parts of the curriculum” (Osler & Starkey, 2004, p.19). However, it

is not unimaginable. Establishing connections between children's schooling and their own lives is an essential aspect of learning and it should be included in all subjects. In this respect, the implementation of a citizenship education framework should meet certain demands. For example, "citizenship education also requires a school climate of openness to debate and discussion. This in turn implies the explicit adherence to a set of common values based on democratic ideals of freedom, equality and human rights. Where this is in place, citizenship education is often a very positive experience for teachers and learners" (Osler & Starkey, 2004, p. v). The school should be the place where social ties are strengthened and children learn how to live with others. Teachers are responsible for the kind of learning experiences they offer their students. "Successful citizenship education involves active learning and opportunities to undertake open-ended investigations of issues that have real social and political significance" (Osler & Starkey, 2004, p. vi). Such is the case of environmental issues.

In addition, the Council of Europe recommends that "concepts associated with human rights can, and should, be acquired from an early stage. For example, the non-violent resolution of conflict and respect for other people can already be experienced within the life of a pre-school or primary class" (Council of Europe, 1985, p. 2). Also, every student has a number of responsibilities, for instance, the "active obligation to work to further the aims of the community" (Osler & Starkey, 1996, p.164). Also, "all activity in the school should then be directed to achieving the aims and thus contribute to the common good" (Osler & Starkey, 1996, p.165). In other words, people are part of a larger social network and they play different roles or assume multiple identities as they relate to others: citizens, neighbours, classmates, sons or daughters, etc. "Human rights education, with its emphasis on essential humanity and equality of rights, enables us to develop these cumulative identities through a process which we refer to as the consciousness of 'both/and'" (Osler & Starkey, 1996, p.75).

Within this context, Byram (2014) proposes that language teaching is *education* in the sense that it should develop the potential of the individual to contribute to society by taking critical action in the world. In his view, learners work with others to address a problem in the world they identify with and act together to instill change.

### **Materials and Technology**

- Paper puppet
- School waste bins
- Plastic gloves
- Newspapers
- A camera

- Art supplies
- Computers and Internet access
- [Venn diagram app](#) (allows users to compare and contrast information in a visually appealing way)
- [Toilet Green Crime](#) video on YouTube

### Preparation

1. Familiarise yourself with the school policy as regards environmental and citizenship education. Other teachers may be implementing different projects connected with these issues.
2. Get in contact with other teachers who may be willing to participate in this project and plan ahead.
3. Check if you have all the necessary technological equipment ready to be used in class. If you do not have classroom computers with Internet access, book sessions in your school's computer lab in advance.
4. Assemble resources and materials (websites, gloves, markers, etc.).

### Instructional Plan

#### Project timeline

Session 1	Introduction: Meet the Green Hero Green crimes	Homework 1 Analysis: My community
Session 2	Anonymous Green Heroes in the neighbourhood Show and tell (My community) Trash sorting principles	
Session 3	Anonymous Green Heroes at school Analysis: My school (green crimes and trash analysis)	
Session 4	Anonymous Green Heroes at home Analysing different images Designing ads	Homework 2 Analysis: My family
Session 5	Anonymous Green Heroes network Analysis: My family (data collection) and Venn diagram online tool (pair work presentation)	Homework 3 Taking action: My extended network (the tree)
Session 6	Anonymous Green Heroes go digital Taking action: My extended network (show trees and class debate) and going digital (video)	

Table 1: Project timeline.

Note: Each session in this timeline may need to be developed in more than one lesson.

## Objectives

In terms of linguistic and plurilingual competences, children will be able to:

- acknowledge and value linguistic diversity
- analyse critically images, videos, texts, habits, etc.
- acquire, understand and use specific language related to environmental issues, and
- interact in English with others

As regards intercultural citizenship, children will be able to:

- express readiness to interact with others
- allow others to express their points of view without animosity and embracing disagreement
- foster values such as respect, empathy, acceptance and social consciousness
- engage in civic participation locally

As regards environmental education, children will be able to:

- identify and understand environmental issues in their own local contexts
- research and reflect on environmental issues in their community
- develop trash sorting and recycling awareness
- employ trash sorting and recycling methods
- inspire others (their neighbours, classmates, friends, families, etc.) to develop environmental awareness
- commit themselves to improving the environment in their local communities (including the school)

## Session 1: Green crimes

1. Students meet the Green Hero, the main character in this project. Find or draw a picture of a superhero and colour it green.
2. Encourage students to interact with the paper puppet that represents the Green Hero and to ask him questions. Also, elicit what students think a green hero is. The puppet then invites students to help him protect the environment by saying:

I live in a green house but my house is in a grey world. Green criminals attack my world. They don't respect me. They don't respect you! They do terrible things to my world! I can't fight against them alone, let's work together! Help me find these green criminals. Can you help me? Let's work together!

If necessary, use visual support to clarify vocabulary such as *world* or *criminal* as the puppet talks to students.

3. The puppet introduces a green crime and tells students that it takes place in Denmark (locate this country in a map, if necessary). Write *Toilet green crime* on the board, encouraging students to brainstorm ideas related to the topic and predicting what the video will be about. For example, they think about what type of crimes they will see (waste toilet paper, let water run while brushing your teeth, turn on the light during the day, etc.) and who will commit those crimes (a girl, a boy, a man, etc.). Remember to write students' contributions on one side of the board in order to check students' predictions later on.
4. Students watch the [Toilet Green Crime](#) video. Since students will not be familiar with the language used in the video (Danish), draw their attention to the image and gestures the characters make in order to identify green crimes and guess what the girl is saying:

**Work alone:** Watch the video and colour the correct speech bubble. What is the girl saying?

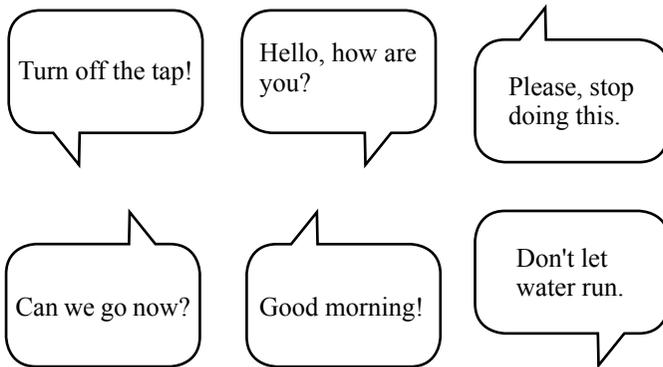


Figure 1. Students' worksheet 1: Toilet green crime, Task 1.

Tell students what the girl says in Danish (*Mor; hallo - tænk nu på miljøet, mand!* Hey mom, come on, think green) and establish connections between their choices, the concept of *think green* and the message that appears at the end of the video: *Spar på vandet/Don't waste water.*

5. In order to trigger the development of this project, encourage students to talk about the scene in small groups following these questions:

**Work together:** Read, discuss and answer the following questions.

How does the girl feel about the situation?

---

Which character reflects your own attitude to the environment?

---

What would you say to the woman?

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Figure 2. Students' worksheet 1: Toilet green crime, Task 2.

Initiate a whole-class debate after group discussion.

- Write these concepts on the board: green crime, green criminal, green victim, green hero. Draw students' attention to the following labels and elicit information about the video. Students come up with other green crime scenes and draw them:

**Work alone:** Draw a green crime scene! Label the picture using the following concepts: GREEN CRIMINAL · GREEN CRIME · GREEN VICTIM · GREEN HERO.

Figure 3. Students' worksheet 1: Toilet green crime, Task 3.

Monitor students' work.

- Present *Homework 1* (due Session 2): students carry out an exploratory task in order to recognise green crimes in their community/neighbourhood.

### **Students' Homework 1**

*Anonymous Green Heroes walk the streets. What other green crimes do you know? Who commits them?*

Ask your parents to go for a walk in your neighbourhood and record the green crimes you see (Preguntale a tus papás si te llevan a dar una vuelta por el barrio y registra todos los 'green crimes' que puedas encontrar). You can take photographs using cameras, cell phones or simply make notes and drawings.

*Show and Tell!* Use your pictures and notes to prepare a presentation for next class in 5 minutes.

Language focus

- Describing green crimes and green heroes using the simple present tense.
- Understanding instructions in reading, writing words, labeling pictures.
- Imperatives (Turn off the light; Don't waste water).
- Expressing feelings (The girl feels upset/angry/sad, etc.).

**Session 2: Anonymous green heroes in the neighbourhood**

1. Show and tell: students show the photos/pictures of the places they have visited, identify and tell their classmates about the different green crimes they could spot in their neighbourhoods. Although this task may be time consuming, allow everybody time to speak and show what they did.
2. Bring the class back together for discussion. Focus on the concept of waste. Record students' perceptions on chart paper with the heading What our community wastes and tell students to brainstorm a set of simple trash sorting principles (dry vs. wet trash, items that can be recycled vs. disposable items, etc.) to remind their community on how to protect the environment.

Language focus

- Describing pictures by using the vocabulary introduced in Session 1 (In this photo/picture, there's a bottle on the grass. This is a green crime).
- Suggesting ways of sorting waste and protecting the environment (We can...; We could...; What about ...?; A good idea is to...; etc.).
- Giving advice (Our community should...; They shouldn't...).

**Session 3: Anonymous green heroes at school**

1. Students carry out an exploratory task to see what happens at school. Take your students for a walk around the school and identify green crimes. Record students performing this task with a camera. To record them, you will need their parents' permission as well as the school authorities'.
2. Tell students to get together in small groups and sit down on the corridor, near a waste bin. Following their trash sorting principles, students take the bags from the waste bins, empty them out onto old newspaper or any protected surface and pick through the trash (wearing plastic gloves), documenting what they find:

Items found...	How many?	Could it be recycled?
		yes / no / perhaps
		yes / no / perhaps
		yes / no / perhaps
		yes / no / perhaps

Figure 4. Students' worksheet 2, Trash analysis.

3. Bring the class back together for discussion. Students talk about commonly mis-trashed items and reflect on which of these things could be recycled. Then, pupils

brainstorm possible ways to educate and remind the rest of the school on how to better sort their waste. Record students' perceptions on chart paper with the heading *What we waste at school.*

Language focus

- Suggesting ways of sorting waste and keeping the school clean (We can...; We could...; What about ...?; A good idea is to...; etc.).
- Giving advice (People at school should...; We shouldn't...; We're responsible for...).

#### **Session 4: Anonymous green heroes at home**

1. Students talk about different materials/products. Show different pictures for students to classify them and carry out a reflective task. Ask these questions: *What can you see? What are these people/ children doing?* (you may select pictures of people sorting trash and/or throwing everything away in the same waste bin; people planting a tree or making compost). *Why is there so much waste in the world? Which of the following actions are eco-friendly?* (Connect this concept with the idea of green hero, green people, green children/kids).
2. Encourage students to come up with five ideas/reasons for sorting and recycling waste. First, students work in small groups and then, initiate a whole-class debate and vote for the best five reasons. Record students' perceptions on chart paper with the heading *Why should we sort waste?*
3. Using the results from the Trash analysis and the reasons why they think it is important to sort waste, students write eco-friendly slogans to advertise popular products and/or design the advertisement to match eco-friendly slogans such as *Drink me up but don't drop me* (for a bottle of soda or water) or *Keep calm and go green*, among others you may come up with. Put up students' ads on school walls.
4. Present *Homework 2* (due Session 5): What happens at home? Are you committing green crimes too? Is your family eco-friendly? Students carry out a survey at home.

#### **Students' Homework 2**

*Survey: How green are you?*

1. Circle the types of products you usually buy.

*DURABLE products (example: pens, combs, etc.)*

*DISPOSABLE products (examples: shampoo bottles, plastic packaging, juice boxes, etc.)*

2. How much of these types of products do you buy? Circle.

*LOTS OF THEM / NOT THAT MUCH*

3. Do you consider buying eco-friendly products? For example, products which have special logos indicating they can be recycled

or that they have been recycled.

YES / NO

4. Do you sort waste? Why? Why not? Write.

YES, because.....

NO, because.....

5. Do you know what types of things can be recycled?

YES / NO

Language focus

- Describing pictures using the present continuous tense and language of description (In this picture, a girl is throwing...; I can see waste/ people sorting waste; etc.).
- Describing habits using the simple present tense and adverbs of frequency (At home we always buy eco-friendly products; We never use...; Sometimes I buy...).
- Vocabulary about ecology and the environment (eco-friendly products; green habits; durable and disposable products; recycling; etc.).

**Session 5: Anonymous green heroes network**

1. Chart and analyse the results of the poll. In pairs, students share the result of their surveys, compare both families and prepare a short class presentation using the Venn diagram tool to illustrate their findings. Show students how to use the tool by creating one diagram as a model on the board.
2. Present *Homework 3, My extended network: The Tree* (due Session 6): each student writes his or her name at the bottom of the tree. Then, they have to tell two different people what they have learned about recycling and sorting waste (for example, the five *Why should I...?* reasons to be eco-friendly), complete the chart with their names and encourage them to pass the message on. This task can be carried out in different ways: orally, in face to face conversation, or through Facebook, e-mail, Twitter, etc. After that, these people will have to repeat the same procedure and students should monitor them (if possible, students should find out who they are in order to complete the chart with their names too).

### Students' Homework 3

*Help me, Help you*

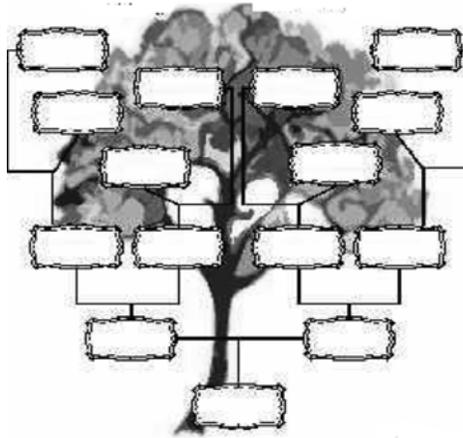


Figure 5. Students' homework 3, My extended network.

Language focus:

- Describing and comparing people's habits using the present simple tense.

### Session 6: Anonymous green heroes go digital

1. Students show their trees to the class and draw conclusions. Initiate a class debate asking: *Why is it important to tell people what we know about waste? Why is it important to ask for help? What will happen if we all recycle? Or what will happen if we all sort waste?* (Use L1 if necessary: Si cada uno cumple con su rol, podemos lograr que el planeta sea un lugar mejor para todos. Tu palabra cuenta/If we all do what we have to do, we can make the planet a better place. Your voice counts.)
2. Students record a short video to pass on the message: *Help me, Help you*. Bring the class together for a discussion on how they will do this and what they will say. Also, encourage students to use different languages (Spanish, English and any other language they can speak). Record students' ideas on chart paper with the heading *Help me, Help you*. Make the video and remember to ask for parents' consent first. Upload it to the school's website, students' Facebook accounts and spread the word!

Language focus

- Persuading others to sort waste, recycle and think green (It's important to... because...; If we all..., the world will be...; Please help us!; Stop wasting water; etc.)

### **Extension**

This project can be carried out as part of a collaborative work between different courses in the same school or as a local online project between two different schools within the same city, a national online or an international online project. In this case, create a [Wiki](#), which is a virtual space of communication that can be easily implemented and monitored in class.

### **Student Assessment/Reflections**

Informally assess students' comprehension of green crimes and waste treatment during whole-class discussions. Observe students' participation during the sessions, take notes, collect and review their works.

Monitor students' progress and process as they work in groups, take notes and assess their work following these categories:

- Group work (if members contribute equally to the project or not; if they argue or not when they disagree; the way they solve conflict, etc.);
- Content and presentation of final product (content coverage, degree of understanding of the topic, ability to answer questions about the topic and oral skills—clarity, fluency, enthusiasm, etc.).

Interview different students to evaluate the impact of the project.

### **Related Websites**

- [Celebrate Earth Day](#): Celebrate this day at school and invite other students to join in. Have a look at other Earth Day events worldwide and get inspired.
- [Research some environmentalists and write Letter Poems](#).

### **Conclusion**

This project represents a way of helping children “feel they can make a difference” (Osler, 2005, p. 16). Addressing and analysing complex issues, such as environmental problems, through contexts that are quite familiar and appealing for young learners, as it is the case of heroes vs. villains or criminals, facilitates the debate, motivates children to work on common concerns like people's behaviour towards waste sorting practices and encourages them to take action within their communities, feeling real agents of change.

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