



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

BACKGROUND AND THEME

“REVERENCE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT”

Authored by [Global Oneness Project](#)

In 1968, three astronauts completed the first manned orbit around the moon, becoming the first humans to see the Earth from space—as it had never been seen before. The first color photograph taken beyond Earth’s orbit was later titled Earthrise.

This new perspective, shared with the world through the Earthrise photograph, radically changed humanity’s view of itself and our relationships with each other and the planet. The visible lack of national boundaries and seeing the Earth as a beautiful complete whole in the vastness of space, provided a window into the beauty, unity, and vulnerability of life on Earth.

The word “revere” can be defined as having a deep respect or admiration for something. Reverence for life is a fundamental experience of being human—to be in awe of life and all its forms of expression. When we hold our environment and natural world with reverence, we are often inspired toward conscious, ethical, and moral decision-making about how to live on our planet. This could include a commitment to do no harm, to live sustainably, and to take action towards protecting the planet’s oceans, forests, and species.

The astronauts of Apollo 8 left Earth to learn about the moon, but returned to Earth with a renewed reverence for the beautiful blue marble we call home. Astronaut Bill Anders summarized his feelings about the trip: “We came here to explore the moon, and the most important thing is that we discovered the Earth.”

For the first time in human history the Earthrise photograph offered a new way to see the Earth. Astronaut Frank Borman said that “everything we held dear” was on that planet. The astronauts were struck by how the vast emptiness of space accentuated the beauty and vulnerability of Earth. They acknowledged that “you don’t see cities, you don’t see boundaries” on Earth from space. Instead, the planet appears as one entity, one entire community of life, one ecosystem.

The image was an inspiration for the creation of Earth Day and the Environmental Protection Agency. In 1970, five days after the Apollo 13 return, the first Earth Day took place and remains on calendars today, symbolizing environmentalism, sustainability, and ecological justice. It is estimated that over 1 billion people participate in Earth Day activities each year.

Nature photographer Galen Rowell declared the Earthrise image as “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken.” Viewing the Earth from space allowed the astronauts and the world to recognize, honor, and revere the Earth as home to all living aspects.