



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

EARTHRISE PHOTOGRAPH: FOSTERING AWE

"We were all awestruck by the beauty of the Earth and its color against the blackness of space."

—Astronaut Bill Anders

OVERVIEW

Students watch the film Earthrise and learn how the emotion of awe felt by the Apollo 8 astronauts and the world helped them to experience the world as a shared home.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the start of a unit on earth science, environmental science, ecology, or astronomy
- On Earth Day, April 22nd
- Anytime throughout the school year, but especially to foster a sense of global interconnectedness

TIME REQUIRED

- Part 1: 45 minutes
- Part 2: 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High school
- College

MATERIALS

- Internet access and TV/projector
- [Earthrise film](#)
- [Earthrise photograph](#)

- *Earthrise* [mini-clip](#)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand that the experience of awe promotes broadened perspectives, helping people to see humanity with new eyes

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

This practice is the first in a series of three practices on the Earthrise photograph, including [Earthrise Photograph: Bearing Witness to Our Planet \(Practice #2\)](#) and [Earthrise Photograph: Cultivating Global Citizenship \(Practice #3\)](#); it can also be done by itself.

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- 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—possibly prompted by the feeling of awe--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.
- Awe is the expansive feeling we get in the presence of something vast that challenges our understanding of the world.
- Take a moment to reflect on the Earthrise photograph. Do you feel a sense of expansiveness? In what ways, if any, does it change your perspective?
- How does the Earthrise photograph instill a sense of awe and wonder as a human being living on the Earth?

INSTRUCTIONS

PART 1 (45 MINUTES)

- Share with students background information about the film *Earthrise*:
 - *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.*
 - *The film "Earthrise" tells the story of this image captured by the Apollo 8 astronauts—Bill Anders, Frank Borman, and Jim Lovell—and recounts their experiences, exploring the beauty, awe, and grandeur of the Earth against the blackness of space.*
- Watch the film [Earthrise](#) (30:01) with students.
- Display the [Earthrise photograph](#). Ask students:
 - *What does the photograph make you wonder?*
 - *How do you think the Earthrise image impacted the Apollo 8 astronauts' way of thinking about the planet and its inhabitants?*
 - *What does the Earthrise photograph represent to you? What do you think it represents to society?*

PART 2 (30 MINUTES)

- Share with students:
 - *Awe is an emotion that gives us feeling of expansiveness—e.g., physical, auditory, mental—and transforms the way we see the world and/or our place in it. It can make us feel connected to one another.*
 - *When people feel awe, they may use other words to describe the experience, such as wonder, amazement, surprise, or transcendence.*
- Invite students to close their eyes and think of a time when they might have felt awe or wonder or amazement or surprise. What happened? How did they feel? Did it shift the way they see the world and/or their place in it? Give students the opportunity to share their experience with a partner, small group, or the whole class.
- Share the [short clip](#) depicting the moment the astronauts saw the Earth rising from the dark side of the moon. Lead a discussion with students exploring the following questions:
 - *Describe the astronauts' experiences during this moment on the Apollo 8 mission. In your words, what do they express?*
 - *In the film, astronaut Jim Lovell said, "The vast loneliness is awe-inspiring and it makes you realize just what you have back on Earth. The Earth from here is a grand oasis in the big vastness of space." How did Lovell's experience of vastness contribute to changing his perspective towards Earth?*
- Ask students to reflect on their experience of viewing the film *Earthrise*. How might the feeling of awe contribute to a shift in perspective?

CLOSURE OR HOMEWORK

- Have students write an essay on one of these questions:
 - Nature photographer Galen Rowell described the Earthrise photograph as "...the most influential environmental photograph ever taken." Do you think Earthrise is an influential environmental photograph? Why or why not?

- 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. What message does this send to the world?
- Do you think the emotion of awe can only be experienced individually? Do you think we can experience awe through someone else’s eyes? Why or why not?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to the film and/or photograph? Did you notice whether some students expressed a feeling of expansiveness or a shift in how they viewed themselves or humanity and their place in the world?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Awe](#) is the feeling we get in the presence of something vast that challenges our understanding of the world, like looking up at millions of stars in the night sky or marveling at the birth of a child. When people feel awe, they may use other words to describe the experience, such as wonder, amazement, surprise, or transcendence.

Scientists have found that awe has an amazing capacity to make us feel [more connected](#) to other people and humanity. In one [study](#), participants spent time near an awe-inducing Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton or in a regular hallway. When asked to describe themselves, the dinosaur viewers were more likely to use universal descriptors (such as “a person” or “an inhabitant of the Earth”) rather than more specific descriptors (such as “tall,” “friendly,” or “a student”) than the other people, suggesting that awe increases our sense that we are part of a greater whole.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

According to researchers, [empathy](#)--a critical quality that helps humans feel connected and compassionate towards one another--may be on the decline in students.

Reminding students of their common humanity, whether through an awe-inducing experience or just a [gentle reminder](#) like the Earthrise photograph, can help to foster positive school relationships, cultivating classroom and school climates where all students feel safe and that they belong. And students who grow up with this sense of connectedness eventually become adults who may contribute to creating a more connected world.

SOURCE

The Global Oneness Project is a free multimedia platform that brings the world’s culture alive in the classroom by using stories as a pedagogical tool for growing minds. Their collection of documentary films, photo essays, and lesson plans highlight cultural, environmental, and social issues with universal themes including our common humanity. <https://www.globalonenessproject.org/>

To access the entire Earthrise curriculum, visit the Global Oneness Project: [click here](#)

The film *Earthrise* was nominated for a Webby Award for the best video in the science and education category. In addition, *Earthrise* was a finalist in the Creativity category for *Fast Company's* World Changing Ideas Awards.