

# POLLUTION PLEDGE

**Purpose:** This activity will help students to think critically about their actions and how they affect air quality, the environment, and human health. Students will think about how we can make a positive impact on the environment - too much doom and gloom about the environment can lead to a sense of helplessness and a lack of motivation to make even simple changes. It's also important to understand the big picture - industry, energy, and transportation play such a huge role in air pollution, and, while children aren't entirely disconnected to those systems, their power to make immediate changes is limited (just like with most adults). Understanding that it's all complex but that there is room for individual impact is the focus of this activity. This activity is meant to follow other related activities.

*Optional: If the facilitator would like to expand this activity into an advocacy project, we have provided suggestions to help students form an action plan and amplify their voices.*

## **Supplies:**

- Whiteboard, blackboard, projection, or other writing surface visible to the whole group
- Paper and writing/art supplies for students (or print and use the attached handout)

**Pre-Activity Discussion:** Tell students that they will each be making personal pledges for how they will help do their part to reduce air pollution. Alternatively, you can also make a class or group pledge for everyone to work on together.

## **Directions:**

- As a group, brainstorm and develop a list of ways they can personally improve air quality or reduce their negative impact on air quality. Have the students come up to the board one at a time to write down their ideas. Focus on ideas that apply to their own daily lives. (As needed, clarify indirect connections, like how clothing is made in factories that produce air pollution, therefore buying fewer new clothing and/or buying second-hand clothes can be a positive action related to air quality.)
- After brainstorming, ask students to each pick one or two activities that they could realistically incorporate into their own lives.
- Students can then write it down as their personal pledge. They could draw a picture to go along with it, or sign their names to the bottom. Let them get as creative as they want. You may want to hang these up as a reminder.
- Another fun thing for sillier groups is to go outside and actually read their pledge to the air itself.

## **Post-Activity Discussion:**

- Have students share their pledges with the group. Why did they pick what they did? How easy do they think it will be to incorporate this into their lives?
- Ask the students to share their pledges with at least one person outside the group like a parent or sibling. You can check in next week to see how the pledges are going.

**Group Against Smog & Pollution (GASP)**

[www.gasp-pgh.org](http://www.gasp-pgh.org)



### **Next Steps: Expanding the pledge into an advocacy project**

Students can be some of the best advocates for the environment. Adults in a position of power sometimes find it easy to dismiss other concerned adults but might pay more attention to a group of passionate students brave enough to voice their concerns.

Examples of influential young environmental activists include Greta Thornburg, a Swedish teenager who started her weekly school strikes in 2018 and has since met with world leaders, spoken at global conferences, and led marches around the world.

### **Ideas to turn the pledge into an action plan:**

- Focus initially on concrete actions within a student's control, either personally or ways they can influence their parents or other adults close to them.
  - For example, if a student wants to eliminate their families use of plastic shopping bags, they can commit to using only reusable bags. They can take steps like working with their parents to buy reusable bags and helping to make sure those bags are kept in the car or located in an easy place to pick up on the way to the grocery store. Write out a plan.
- Next, help students amplify their voices: send postcards to elected officials, write letters to the editor, ask local business owners or elected officials to join in their pledge, organize a school or community event focused on a specific action related to their pledge... See the YVFP Action Plan.
- Can the pledges be applied to the school at large? What steps can the students take to implement a school-wide change? Develop an action plan, along with an appropriate timeline.

### **Additional Resources:**

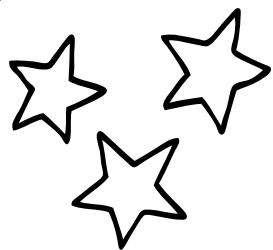
Young Voices for the Planet short film "Words Have Power": In this 6-minute film, 10-year-old Jaysa, from Bridgeport, Connecticut, muses about why there are so many plants — including the coal-fired power plant— in her neighborhood and whether "it may be a case of environmental racism." She rallies the community speaking out about how the plant causes asthma and "so much suffering" and helps get the plant shut down. She concludes that "words have power."

Greta Thornberg's United Nations Speech: In her 5-minute speech, Greta Thornberg addresses global leaders and questions whether they are more concerned with economic growth than addressing the serious effects of climate change.

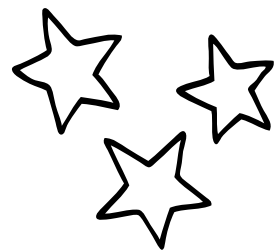
CNN article "Greta Thunberg isn't alone. Meet some other young activists who are leading the environmentalist fight": This article profiles five other young environmental activists, including Autumn Peltier, a Canadian water activist who advocates for clean drinking water in First Nations communities. A group could split up and research these activists (or others) and introduce them to the group.

Young Voices for the Planet's Action Plan: This series of action-oriented lessons uses the YVFP videos to help students visualize how they can fight for the environment. Lesson Eight focuses on turning ideas into action, including a long list of specific ideas that could turn into community-wide campaigns.

Take Action with the American Lung Association: Find tips to becoming an advocate for issues related to lung health, as well as a guide to writing letters to the editor.



# MY POLLUTION PLEDGE

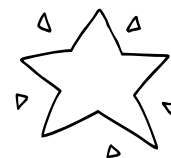


Steps I will take to improve air quality:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Pledge Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## WHAT WILL YOU DO TO PROMOTE CLEAN AIR?



Everyone can take steps to both improve air quality and to reduce their negative impact on air quality. You can start making an impact by thinking about what you can do yourself and then making a pledge to make those changes.

For example, how can you reduce use of plastics, reduce waste, or reduce transportation pollution? Or how can you influence your family, school, or community to make positive changes?

*Would you like to share your pledge and inspire others? Take a picture of your pledge and either share it on Instagram and tag @gasppgh or email it to [laura@gasp-pgh.org](mailto:laura@gasp-pgh.org).*

**Learn more about what you can do and keep up with local air quality issues!**

**Group Against Smog and Pollution**  
[gasp-pgh.org](http://gasp-pgh.org)

