



**Doing GCE in Wood Technology**

**Supplementary Material**

**April 2024**

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## 1.2 Sustainable Forestry Management and Certification

### GCE Methodology: Additional Case Studies

#### 1. The Fight to Save an Ancient Forest

In the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America and Canada there are ancient old growth forests which host giant trees that can live for over a thousand years. On Vancouver Island, British Columbia lies the Fairy Creek valley. This valley is within First Nation territory and is home to a variety of ancient tree species such as hemlock, spruce and cedar. Not only is this a forest, it is also a culturally important area to the Pacheedaht First Nation people. Yet, the First Nation people are not the only people who value the forest. The timber in this forest is also prized by the logging industry as it is of such high quality and this area has become a target for felling.

Not too far from Fairy Creek there is a 1,200 year old Douglas fir nicknamed 'Lonely Doug', who stands alone as the last remaining tree from an old growth forest that was clear cut. There are plans by the same company to also clear cut Fairy Creek. This plan has been met with resistance from the Pacheedaht First Nation people who have been supported by other protesters. One approach to protecting the forest taken by the protesters is to occupy the trees. More information in the video and links below.

More information here:

- 🔗 Inside the fight to save an ancient forest  
[https://youtu.be/mRd8\\_Tu7YDs](https://youtu.be/mRd8_Tu7YDs)
- 🔗 Radiolab podcast about the plethora of life that can exist within forests  
<https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cDovL2ZlZWRzLndueW Mub3JnL3JhZGlvbGFi/episode/NzNlMmEyOTEtM2M5Mi00NzB mLWE0YTktZTE5ODBiOGJjNTUx?ep=14>
- 🔗 Fairy Creek Headwaters website  
<https://ancientforestalliance.org/photos/fairy-creek-headwaters/>
- 🔗 Rainforest Flying Squad (protesters)  
[https://m.facebook.com/Rain4estFlyingSquad/?\\_nodl&ref=external%3Awww.youtube.com&\\_rdr](https://m.facebook.com/Rain4estFlyingSquad/?_nodl&ref=external%3Awww.youtube.com&_rdr)

[https://www.instagram.com/rainforestflyingsquad/?utm\\_medium=copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/rainforestflyingsquad/?utm_medium=copy_link)

## **2. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Trees in Cities Challenge**

Since the UNECE first launched their Trees in Cities Challenge in 2019 they claim that over 50 cities globally have pledged to plant more trees. The idea behind this is to make cities greener while also combating some of the effects of climate change. The planting of trees in cities can improve the health of people in the cities by absorbing emissions and producing cleaner air as a result. Furthermore, like Sehmus Erginoglu and his fruit bearing trees in southern Turkey, it is planned to plant trees which produce fruit that can contribute to food security in the cities.

More information here:

- ☐ UNECE Trees in Cities Challenge website

<https://treesincities.unece.org/#sthash.rFvP5USp.ToIhQUQb.dpbs>

- ☐ UNECE Trees in Cities Challenge introduction video

[https://youtu.be/\\_0IeNgMxh0c](https://youtu.be/_0IeNgMxh0c)

- ☐ UNECE Forests for Food: From Food Deserts to Food Forests video

<https://youtu.be/O3Q2GSyBiIE>

## **3. How Forest Gardens are Feeding People in Ethiopia**

The Gedeo people in the district of Bule, Ethiopia practice agroforestry which is a form of agriculture that involves the growing of trees. This practice has been passed from one generation to the next since Neolithic times. This case study centres around Aster who is a farmer and mother of six who meets all of her family's nutrition requirements by farming in her garden. Not only does this sustain Aster and her family but also some wildlife like the black and white Mantled Colobus monkeys.

More information:

- ☐ How Ancient Forest Gardens are Keeping Hunger at Bay

<https://newint.org/immersive/2021/01/06/sheltering-fjf-forest>

- ☐ UNESCO-description and details of Gedeo Cultural Landscape (2020)

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6448/>

- United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS)- Home garden agroforestry practices in the Gedeo zone, Ethiopia: a sustainable land management system for socio-ecological benefits (2016).

[https://satoyama-initiative.org/case\\_studies/home-garden-agroforestry-practices-in-the-gedeo-zone-ethiopia-a-sustainable-land-management-system-for-socio-ecological-benefits/](https://satoyama-initiative.org/case_studies/home-garden-agroforestry-practices-in-the-gedeo-zone-ethiopia-a-sustainable-land-management-system-for-socio-ecological-benefits/)

#### 4. Rwanda's Volcano National Park

This national park in Rwanda is an example of how people are making a conscious effort to reforest and conserve areas while also sustaining themselves as well as the local ecosystem and wildlife. This approach is of particular interest as it supports some of the endangered mountain gorillas and rare golden monkeys which live only in this area. It is important to note that to some extent, wildlife is supported through the planting of crops by farmers; animals are allowed to eat these crops unharmed as the farmers are compensated for any damaged crops and the money generated from tourism is invested in the local community.

More information:

- Rwanda National Park Website <https://www.volcanoesnationalparkrwanda.com/>
- Rwanda Project -Volcanoes National Park <https://africanccf.org/our-projects/rwanda-project/#:~:text=The%20Rwanda%20Project%20%E2%80%93%20Volcanoes%20National,reforestation%20with%20local%20indigenous%20trees.>
- Our Great National Parks Episode 1 – A World of Wonder on Netflix minutes 41-46 <https://www.netflix.com/title/81086133>

#### 5. Leaving only Hoofprints and Footprints – Environmentally Friendly Timber Harvesting

Simon Lenihan is a Limerick born forester who runs an ecological logging company which aims to leave as small a trace as possible on the environment. Simon uses horses to extract trees that are not thriving from the forest which he argues benefits the forest and its ecosystem in the long term. One distinct advantage of using horses for this process is that they do not compact the ground the way that widely used machinery does. Ground compaction can affect how water is absorbed and flows on the land leading to flooding in extreme cases.

More information:

- Simon's Company - Celtic Horse Logging

<http://www.celtichorselogging.com/>

🔗 Irish Times article

<https://www.irishtimes.com/business/work/the-limerick-forester-whose-craft-fascinated-the-queen-1.4781532>

## 6. Indigenous Amazonian Communities & Climate Activists.

It is estimated that for 10,000 years Indigenous communities in the Amazon rainforest felled less than 0.5% of the trees while simultaneously planting useful species of tree that aided biodiversity. However, since the arrival of the European colonialists these people have suffered slavery and violence, land grabbing and displacement, with estimates that only 10% of the Indigenous population remains. Violence against the Indigenous Amazonians continues to this day as they are constantly harassed by businesses in the form of agriculture, construction, illegal mining, and logging. In 2021 these crimes were found to have contributed to a 62% rise in the rate of homicides in the Northern region of Brazil where the Amazon is located.

Amidst the destructive atmosphere, indigenous communities have teamed up with European youth activists and have collectively become front line defenders of the rainforests. The alliance includes Belgian School Strikers, representative from Extinction Rebellion UK and the Russian feminist punk group Pussy Riot, as well as international academics and scientists. These groups met in an event that was called 'Amazon: Centro do Mundo' and discussed what the Amazon rainforest was, what it will be, and how to defend it from further destruction.

The indigenous shaman and figurehead Davi Kopenawa Yanomami is hopeful in the youth climate movement: "It's a new way of thinking and it's very strong. The young from the cities are listening to the cry of the Amazon. They see the fire and the deforestation and they know that you can't keep killing trees" (From the Guardian Nov 2019).

More information:

<https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/how-young-indigenous-quilombola-and-riverine-people-tapajos-river-are-becoming-rainforest?page=1>

The Guardian Article: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/17/amazon-rain-forest-protest-climate-crisis>

Watch a BBC clip which documents an increase in deforestation under the presidency of Bolsonaro in Brazil <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYlnoxgqEWO>

## 1.3 Forests and Biodiversity

### Manu National Park: Additional Information

From the New Internationalist, 'The Limits of Eden', by Jack Lo Lau- a Peruvian journalist focused on indigenous communities' rights, socio-environmental conflicts, and natural territories and wildlife:

The major complaint of the indigenous communities has been that park management has focused exclusively on biodiversity conservation upon their ancestral lands, without any true attempt at partnership with them. The Manu National Park Master Plan does not consider them in its management protocols and schemes. The small settled communities bristle under the restrictions placed on them, forbidding them to raise animals or farm, only allowing them to use the forest for bare survival.

'All the plans carried out so far in the Park are not adequate to the reality of the populations,' says Cusurichi (Julio Cusurichi, president of FENAMAD ). 'The government has imposed rules in their own home, without consulting them. The school classes are given in Spanish, the health centres do not promote ancestral medicine, they cannot cut wood or hunt to earn money. They are being taught the value of money and the supposed benefits of Western life, yet they are not given options to earn money. They are oppressed in the name of conservation, when the people who live in Manu are the ones who have cared for this forest for thousands of years.'

(Julio Cusurichi, is president of FENAMAD, which represents all the indigenous communities of Madre de Dios.)

#### Sources:

- 🔗 New Internationalist- The Limits of Eden (Jan/Feb 2021)  
<https://newint.org/features/2020/12/07/limits-eden>
- 🔗 Indigenous People and the Manu National Park by Silvana Baldovino and Andrea Calmet (2018)  
[https://c98e7aaa-7bb4-49bb-82c9-a7907d6c7363.filesusr.com/ugd/15e8c4\\_2ab18742c0004dbda1f87165c8a2fd5a.pdf](https://c98e7aaa-7bb4-49bb-82c9-a7907d6c7363.filesusr.com/ugd/15e8c4_2ab18742c0004dbda1f87165c8a2fd5a.pdf)

Find out more about Julio Cusurichi, environmental activist and winner of the 2007 Goldman Environmental Prize:

- 🔗 <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/julio-cusurichi/>
- 🔗 <https://www.oneearth.org/environmental-hero-julio-cusurichi/>

## Law Suits in Ecuador

- Ecuador- indigenous community win legal fight over ancestral lands
- <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/indigenous-community-in-ecuador-wins-legal-fight-to-reclaim-ancestral-land-after-more-than-80-years/ar-AA1kHZK9>
- “First time that the Ecuadorian government delivers a land title to an indigenous community whose ancestral territory is found in a protected area,” Amazon Frontline said, adding it “sets an invaluable precedent for all indigenous peoples fighting to recover their lands across Latin America and the world.” ..... Elias Piyahuaje, President of the Siekopai Nation of Ecuador.

## Amazon Chernobyl

- Steven Donziger- Corporate Counterattack by Texaco
- <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a35812573/steven-donziger-chevron-house-arrest/>
- Renegade Inc -Video interview with Steven Donziger <https://medium.com/@renegadeinc/the-amazon-chernobyl-6309a19c27b7>
- Greenpeace- campaign to end human rights violations in the Amazon. [https://engage.us.greenpeace.org/onlineactions/YIJInHKiWkOQ\\_K\\_kJbpUHQ2?utm\\_source=instagram&utm\\_medium=post&utm\\_campaign=210809\\_wipd\\_brazil\\_iz\\_zzzzzzzcz&sourceid=1011096&\\_gl=1\\*1xzvnsk\\*\\_gcl\\_au\\*Mzk2NDgxNDIxLjE3MDE0Mjg3OTk.&\\_ga=2.215117271.1561317875.1701428800-402273290.1701428799](https://engage.us.greenpeace.org/onlineactions/YIJInHKiWkOQ_K_kJbpUHQ2?utm_source=instagram&utm_medium=post&utm_campaign=210809_wipd_brazil_iz_zzzzzzzcz&sourceid=1011096&_gl=1*1xzvnsk*_gcl_au*Mzk2NDgxNDIxLjE3MDE0Mjg3OTk.&_ga=2.215117271.1561317875.1701428800-402273290.1701428799)
- Last Stand in the Amazon- Excellent videographic -Based around Indigenous peoples experiences and struggles <https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-022-03043-6/index.html>

## 1.4 Ireland's Forestry Strategy

### Forestry Facts Ireland

Since the foundation of the Irish state in 1919, **forest cover in the Republic of Ireland** has grown from 1.4% of the land area to 11.6% in 2022, covering a total of 808,848 hectares (statistics available from Forestry Statistics Ireland,



<https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/crops/forestry/advice/Forest-Statistics-Ireland-2022.pdf> ). This represents a significant afforestation effort; an increase in the amount of forests established in Ireland. Despite this national increase, it is significant to point out that our national forest cover is one of the lowest in the EU; in 2020 European nations average at 38.8% of total land area: the worldwide average was 31.1%.

In the national context, the overall afforestation effort is evident in both public and private ownership, and for the first time in the history of the state, there are more privately owned forests than publicly owned forests. In 2022, 49.1% of forests were in state ownership; private ownership made up 50.9% of total forest cover.

Of the total forest area, Sitka spruce is the **most common species**; along with other conifers such as Norway spruce, Scots pine and Douglas fir, the total coniferous coverage is 61.2%. Broadleaves, including oak, beech, sycamore and birch make up 27% of the total forest area. While recent trends show an increase in broadleaf afforestation (41% of total afforested area in 2021), Ireland's forestry remains predominantly coniferous.

The reason that coniferous species like spruce and pine are widely planted in Irish forests is largely due to their faster rate of growth and maturity, as well as their widespread use in construction. The predominance of **coniferous forestry**, and the lack of tree diversity is a concern for the sustainability of forestry; moreover, the impact that this is having on biodiversity. Unlike broadleaf woodlands, Irish Sitka spruce monocultures require fertilisers and pesticides. Sitka plantations are clear-felled, generating acid sulphate, affecting waterways, and leaving whole hillsides scarred for up to two years. This form of forestry ultimately leads to an increase in the rate of soil erosion through their drainage network. This can have a knock on effect on the surrounding bodies of water and rivers as it reduces their pH level, threatening species of animals and plants in the process.

The Climate Action Plan 2021 (CAP21) sets out almost 500 actions to support Ireland's journey towards a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050.

Significant to this is **carbon sequestration**; the process of capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it in soil, plant biomass, deadwood and harvested wood product. Forests and woodlands are considered one of the best forms of natural carbon sequestration. CO<sub>2</sub> binds to plants during photosynthesis, exchanging it for oxygen as a purifying emission. "The national forest estate is an important carbon reservoir, amounting to 311.7 million tonnes of carbon in 2017" (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2022, p.44).

**Youth Consultation on Irelands Forestry Strategy (2022)**

In this section we have included the background information on the youth consultation, called *Working Towards a New Forest Strategy for Ireland: A Guide for Young People*. This is followed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine's *Proposed Vision for Trees, Wood and Forests*. Next are the research questions and prompts put to the youth participants, and finally we have included a summary of the recommendations which arose from the consultation.

All the documents are available here:

<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/233832/4aad72f3-5898-4335-aeb2-b92455ec55af.pdf#page=nulhttp://>

## Appendix A

### Working Towards a New Forest Strategy for Ireland: A Guide for Young People

Thank you so much for taking part in the youth dialogue on Ireland's new Forest Strategy! We've put together this brief guide to help you understand what's involved.

#### Why forests?

Trees are a vital part of Ireland's natural heritage. Ireland needs more of them, with the right trees planted in the right place for the right reasons. For a variety of historical reasons, Ireland has one of the lowest levels of forest cover in the European Union. Paradoxically, this means that Ireland has a special opportunity to improve its natural heritage, by investing in our forests in a way that is sensitive to the landscape and environment, and that allows citizens to benefit from the many benefits offered by it.

#### Why do we need a Forest Strategy?

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) is developing a new Forest Strategy to ensure that trees and forests are maintained, protected, and expanded in a sustainable way. It's important for forests to meet the needs of Irish citizens, and for us to recognize and value everything that forests offer us. The Strategy will establish what we think the role of forests in Ireland should be, both now and in the future, and how we can achieve this.

#### Why are we hosting this youth dialogue?

The Department wants to hear from young people on what you see as the role of trees and forests of all shapes and sizes in Ireland. Your input is crucially important to creating a shared national vision and a new Forest Strategy for trees and forests in Ireland's future.

#### Why should we look after existing forests and create new ones?

- Forests are one of the most effective ways we can mitigate **climate change**
- Forests are complex ecosystems and support **biodiversity** for plants and animals
- Forests produce **timber** for buildings and other wood products, which is an environmentally sustainable material
- Forests can be **social spaces** for recreation, fun activities, and learning
- Forests can help support our physical, mental, and social **health and wellbeing**
- Forests can have **economic benefits** by creating new jobs and incomes

## What will happen to young people's feedback?

Your conversations will be facilitated by adults who will also be taking notes. These notes will be kept anonymous and will be compiled into a report to the Department.

If you have any questions, please email Marina Lambrakis ([marina.lambrakis@foroige.ie](mailto:marina.lambrakis@foroige.ie)).

## Proposed Vision for Trees, Woods and Forests by 2050

**The right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management - supporting a sustainable and thriving economy and society and a healthy environment.**

By 2050, Ireland's forests and woodlands will be seen as a symbol of the transformational social, economic and environmental changes that were needed to address the climate, biodiversity, housing and health emergencies of the 2020's. A much larger and more diverse forestry and woodland footprint is being successfully managed to balance and deliver forestry's multiple objectives and benefits for climate, nature, wood production, people, the wider economy and rural communities. It is co-existing in harmony with farming, urban and other landscapes and valued highly by citizens. It is also supporting a thriving and growing forest industry, long term quality employment, ecosystem services and public, educational and recreational amenities.

Forestry is at the centre of the circular and green economy with Irish grown timber being the material of choice for new Irish homes. It is providing a profitable diversification option for farmers, with people living in rural, urban and suburban communities feeling a sense of connection and pride in their local forests and woodlands, and the many benefits that they provide. Legacy environmental issues associated with past forestry practices have been successfully resolved, building on the improvements in management evident under the 2014-2020 Forestry Programme. The Irish landscape now features a rich variety of trees, woods and forests, established for multiple purposes and delivering multiple benefits for the environment, economy and society on both public and private land.

## Research Questions used in the Youth Consultation:



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

The questions covered were as follows (with follow-up prompt questions in italics):

1. **Do you like trees? What do you like or not like about them?**
2. **When was the last time you took part in an activity in a forest / woodland area? What would encourage you to do more activities in places like this?**

*Prompts: Do you have any favourite memories of walking in the countryside among trees and forests?*

3. **Do you think trees are important for our society? If yes, why are they important?**

*Prompts: What are the most important things that forests do for us?*

4. **If you think about forests in Ireland in the future: what does that vision look like?**

*Prompts: Should we plant more trees and forests, or less?*

*If you were planting a forest today, what would it look like in 5 years? 20 years? 50 years?*

## Summary of Recommendations

1. Barriers to accessing forests and woodland areas should be considered and mitigated, including but not limited to the lack of public transport links, the needs of people with particular accessibility needs, and the need for proper forest management.
2. A range of schemes, initiatives and activities should be developed to enable greater awareness and opportunities to engage with nature.
3. The benefits of trees and forests must be more widely promoted, to support greater recognition and understanding of the importance of trees and forests to many aspects of our lives.
4. Native species should be protected and promoted, in particular broadleaf and hardwood tree species.
5. Tree planting should be done to mimic natural growth patterns.
6. Forests and woodland areas should be properly managed to support overall forest health and maintain accessibility for visitors.
7. Forest cover in Ireland should be expanded to meet the global average of 30.6% of land area at a minimum.
8. Commercial activity should be tempered by the need to ensure environmental sustainability and ecosystem health, and must be subject to robust monitoring.
9. Educational opportunities to learn about trees and forests should be rolled out comprehensively and expanded, both through formal and non-formal education, as well as the provision of dedicated outreach staff.
10. Urban environments should be a key part of Ireland's forest strategy and vision.

## 3.1: Waste as a Global Justice Issue

### Export of Waste- Additional Information:

Ireland remains heavily reliant on export for the treatment of a number of key waste streams, pointing to some significant waste infrastructure deficits and missed opportunities to foster a circular economy. Exported waste for treatment in 2020 included:

- 27 per cent of biodegradable waste;
- 39 per cent of municipal waste;
- 55 per cent of hazardous waste;
- 50 per cent of packaging waste;
- almost all WEEE was exported for the final treatment step.

Up until 2017, China was the primary destination for Ireland's exported waste; in fact it had been known globally as the 'dumping ground' for foreign nations' waste. However, in 2017, the Chinese government announced an import ban on solid waste including several types of plastics and other recyclable waste; and by 2021, China had banned all imports of solid waste, including scrap material. The effect of China's ban was positive in addressing its own environmental and public health issues. Countries in the Global North, like the United States, which was exporting around 4,000 shipping containers of waste to China every day before the ban, were forced to re-route their shipments to Southeast-Asian nations such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Most of these countries lacked the adequate infrastructure to manage their own waste and were unprepared for large imports of waste. This was also in breach of the United Nations Basel Convention which aims to prevent developed countries from dumping their waste in developing countries in order to meet their recycling targets. This prompted many South East Asian countries to return the waste to its country of origin. This resulted in exporting nations, such as Ireland, accumulating massive quantities of waste, drawing to attention their inadequate management of domestic waste and recycling, and leading to increased incineration rates. While exports to China have decreased, Turkey has now become the largest destination for waste exported from the EU. Turkey imported a volume of 14.7 million tonnes in 2021; India was the second largest destination (2.4 million tonnes); and Pakistan has markedly grown as a destination for EU waste with volumes increasing to 1.3 million tonnes in 2021 (Euro-Stat)

### Global Justice Issues

Ireland is generating too much waste, but this is not just a waste management problem. There are wider climate and environmental impacts of increasing waste such as the land-use, resources, chemicals and the energy involved in the creation of products that become waste. In addition, we are not meeting our EU targets, and failing on our commitments to a number of the Global Goals as a result of our waste generation. There are also human rights

implications. At the intersection of all of these issues, we can begin to understand how waste is a global justice issue. Issues to consider include:

#### **Locations of Incinerators/landfills:**

- ☒ The overwhelming majority of incinerators, dumps, landfills, and burn facilities are located near low-income communities, communities of colour and marginalised communities. This results in inadequate levels of noise, litter, traffic and air pollution.
- ☒ Emissions from incinerators lead to health-related issues due to overexposure to particles and dangerous pollutants.
- ☒ Incinerated waste contributes to the release of various hazardous gases, heavy metals, and sulphur dioxide in the air, poisoning wildlife and local communities, who increasingly suffer from cancer, diabetes, hormone disruption, skin alteration, neurotoxicity, kidney, liver and reproductive damage, bone disease, and more. (from Greenpeace).

#### **Waste pickers**

- ☒ In countries such as Malaysia, which import high volumes of waste, waste pickers are the only form of waste collection. According to the United Nations environmental assembly, 60% of the plastic recycled across the world is collected by waste pickers.
- ☒ Waste pickers play a critical role in tackling the waste and plastic pollution crisis. Yet, their work generally goes unrecognised; they are unprotected, they work in unsafe and unhealthy conditions, often without any protection gear and no access to healthcare.
- ☒ Waste pickers are generally not paid a living income and very often face other human rights impacts, such as discrimination, harassment and exclusion from decision-making.
- ☒ Abuse and exploitation are also human rights infringements faced by waste pickers, especially those who are women, immigrants, indigenous or belonging to ethnic minorities and oppressed castes.

#### **Power Issues:**

- ☒ Who creates the waste and who manages it? Who suffers the negative effects from waste generation?
- ☒ The Global North should take responsibility for its own waste and a complete ban on the export of waste outside of the EU should be implemented.

*“The global waste trade sharpens environmental inequality, hierarchy, exploitation along the lines of class and race on a global scale because the ones who suffer the negative impacts are the vulnerable communities who didn’t produce the waste. The issue of waste trade is, undoubtedly, an issue of colonialism.” (Alexia Dreau, 2022: Zero Waste Europe).*



## Cross-curricular English:

Allegory: The Sound of the Yellow Bell- from Brendan O'Donoghue's book 'Adventures in Philosophy'

Some thousands of years ago China was ruled by the great and wise yellow emperor, Huangdi. During the early years of his reign the Yellow Emperor had a very significant dream. He dreamt of a nation populated with peaceful people who lived in complete harmony with the natural world. Since the people lived in harmony with nature, the land did not feel their presence and, because of this, the nation flourished. The people were not only a happy people, they were a joyful people. Even more importantly, the land and animals were joyful too.

Upon waking from his dream, the Yellow Emperor was determined that his people should live in tune with nature. If such harmony could be established, he believed China would find order and prosper.

Yet an immediate difficulty presented itself to the yellow Emperor, as he asked himself. 'How can I establish a harmony between my people and the natural world?' He also wondered, 'What can I say or do that will show the people how to live *with* rather than *apart* from nature?'

He called together his council and the rulers of the arts and sciences to find a way for the people of China to live in tune with nature. After much discussion, the Yellow Emperor decided to send Ling Lun, the Music Ruler, into the distant western provinces in search of the first and founding musical note. This note, known as the yellow bell, *huang chung*, was eternal and helped harmonise the entire universe. If Ling Lun could discover the sound of the yellow bell and if the people heard it, the Yellow Emperor believed the whole of China would find order and thrive.

Ling Lun agreed to take on this great task. He travelled to the outer reaches of the western provinces. On the side of a mountain near a mighty river, Ling Lun cut many pieces of bamboo. He blew through them all, experimenting, as he tried to find the founding note. He noticed that one particular piece of bamboo had the same tone as a person's voice who spoke without desire or attachment in their heart. Ling Lun blew the reed a second time and observed how it made the same sound as the waters of the nearby river.

He blew the bamboo a third time. A colourful bird known as the *fenghuang* appeared. The appearance of this bird was said to be a good sign. The first note from the *fenghuang* was perfectly in tune with Ling Lun's reed.

Ling Lun was now certain he had discovered the sound of the yellow bell. He returned to the Yellow Emperor with the good news that their nation had uncovered the right note for it to be built upon. Founded on the sound of the yellow bell, China was sure to prosper – and it did. Within a few short years, wonderfully designed houses, carts and boats were made. Writing was invented along with coined money, the production of silk and the bow and arrow.

Government institutions were also established, something that had not been done before. For the first time in its history, the people, animals and land lived harmoniously together, and all flourished.

**1. Literacy Exercise and Discussion:**

*Read the extract from the Sound of the Yellow Bell.*

*Use the following questions to have a class discussion around the Yellow Emperor's dream that "people should live in tune with nature. If such harmony could be established, he believed China would find order and prosper".*

- a) The yellow bell is a metaphor in this extract- what might it represent?
- b) How is 'prosperity' described in the extract?
- c) How does this notion of prosperity relate to our understanding and use of the word prosperity in today's world? Think of economic, social, environmental prosperity- are there any more ways to describe or define prosperity?
- d) In what way(s) is harmony between human kind and the natural world linked to prosperity? Think in terms of global prosperity and incorporate the SDGs if possible.
- e) Do you think the harmony between human kind and nature exists in today's world? In parts of the world? Or aspects of society?
- f) Where it does or can exist, identify what makes it possible?
- g) Where it does not exist, identify the obstacles which stand in the way?
- h) What needs to change to bring about the harmony the Yellow Emperor sought, in your local community, and in the global community.