

## Environmental Ethics Introduction

### Student handout

Your best friend is having a birthday party. You go to Big Buy and purchase the perfect gift: a set of cool smartphone covers that you can change according to your mood. You wrap it in Hello Kitty paper which is *still* her favorite and buy her a Hello Kitty balloon.

The party is great. Her parents cook hamburgers and hotdogs on the grill and serve them on plastic Hello Kitty plates. Even after drinking lots of Dasani water from disposable plastic bottles, it's so hot that everyone goes inside to cool off in the air conditioned house. Your friend opens her presents. Yours is first. She rips off the Hello Kitty paper with enthusiasm but is slowed down by the plastic packaging on the phone covers, which require scissors and a knife to pry off. Into the trash go the old phone cover (no need for it anymore), the wrapping paper (it's all ripped up), and the plastic packaging (what else would she do with it?). A half hour later, all the presents have been opened and the trash can is filled with wrapping paper and plastic packaging. You all go back outside to swim in the pool. The Hello Kitty balloon gets away and flies off into the sky. All the other balloons are released to "keep it company."

Now, let's spoil the party. Suppose that, instead of throwing away the plastic plates, bottles, and packaging, and the wrapping paper and the old stuff that has been replaced by new gifts, each person at the party had to take home whatever trash he or she contributed or created because the local landfill has stopped accepting plastic and coated paper. Your trash would include the plastic packaging, the wrapping paper, the old phone cover, two water bottles, two plates and two forks.

What would you do with all of this stuff? If you had to deal personally with all of the plastic objects that you use on a daily basis, you would be swallowed up in a sea of plastic. Where did it all come from? Where will it all go?

The fact that, for most of us, a garbage truck takes away our trash makes it easy to forget about it completely. It seems simply to evaporate. We care about the things inside the packaging, not the packaging itself. And when we stop caring about the things inside, they too seem to evaporate. And what about the balloons? Where do they come from and where do they end up?

You are about to watch a sample of film clips that represent different aspects of environmental ethics. From movies such as *Avatar* and *The Lorax*, which look at our exploitation of trees, nature and native tribes, to *Babe* and *Project X*, where animals are used for food and experiments, students will explore the relationship between people and the earth we live on. Does our ordinary behavior – the habits and practices that we take for granted – contribute to the degradation of the earth? What sort of responsibility, if any, do we have to the natural world and future generations?