



The Girl Who Silenced the World For Five Minutes

Severn Suzuki, David Suzuki Foundation
Canada

☀ Call to Action

Learn more, get involved, & show your support for any number of environmental causes at David Suzuki Foundation: davidsuzuki.org.

☀ Values

- Courage
- Clarity
- Commitment
- Dedication
- Environmentalism

☀ Lessons Learned

If you want to learn about sustainability, you need look no further than Indigenous people. They have been living sustainably for centuries.

Change begins small and grows as we realize the truth: the problems of the underrepresented are our problems too, and we need to unite to solve them.

The economy should serve all the people of the country. If we sacrifice the needs of the people by allowing the economy to dictate our decision making, we will end up destroying the planet.

At age 12, Severn Suzuki traveled with the Environmental Children’s Organization (ECO) to the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – the very country that had inspired her activism on a trip to the Amazon some years prior.

When one of the speakers at the summit dropped out, Severn realized she had the perfect opportunity to get the youth perspective on these issues out to the world. “We were watching as all of these old people were sitting around discussing the future; but we would be the ones to suffer the consequences of their decisions,” she says. “And who was speaking for us?” So, she stepped up, and showed great strength as she gave a powerful speech in front of many of the leading figures in the environmental movement. Years later, her speech became a viral internet sensation, called “The Girl Who Silenced the World For 5 Minutes.” It has reached more than 32 million people.

☀ Language Arts

What is the importance of the Amazon rainforest to our planet? What are the consequences of its destruction? What are the biggest threats threatening the Amazon nowadays? Create your own [Kahoot!](https://www.kahoot.com/) game designed to teach people about the Amazon, its importance, the threats it is under, and the dangers of its destruction. You must create at least 12 questions--and answers!

Create a presentation in which you explain the pros and cons of hydroelectric power. In your presentation make sure to answer the following questions: Why is hydroelectric power considered a better alternative than other, more traditional methods of power generation, like coal? Is hydroelectric power always harmful to the environment, or are there ways to build plants that don’t threaten the environment? Are there any alternatives other that are

more environmentally friendly than hydroelectric generated power?

The line between economic development and protecting the environment can be a delicate one, especially for underdeveloped countries. Write a three-minute speech in which you try to convince the leadership of a developing country (you can choose the country) to, in Severn’s words, build “an architecture for a different way of being, and it should be intergenerational.”

Imagine you could convince world leaders to start building the world in an environmentally responsible way: a way in which the economy works for the people and respects the environment, and where no one needs to choose between clean air and economic activity. Write a short story in which you describe this world, how we got there, and what it took to get there in terms of financial investment, creativity, and political will.

STEM Activities

Severn’s family has worked with Indigenous peoples for many years, fighting the impact deforestation has on their lands. In this [activity](#)², students will use videos and satellite images to investigate the impact of deforestation on forest cover and changes in the carbon cycle by using an interactive time series developed by NASA to analyze forest cover changes in the Amazon rainforest. Students then use the Global Forest Watch tool from the World Resources Institute to develop their own original research question on changes in forest cover using real-time data, images, and other information from the tool to use in a presentation.

One major impact of climate change is water pollution, which is an important resource for Indigenous cultures. In teams, students will practice analyzing water quality, and will use information about water treatment processes to design a prototype for a small-scale water treatment system. Then they will test it to assess how well their prototype produces safe water to prevent water-borne illnesses. [Activity link](#)³.

Severn and her parents have always been interested in Indigenous groups and have been working to help solve the problems they face. Find a group of Indigenous people in your area or region, and research the issues that are affecting their community (deforestation, pollution, water quality, etc.). Explore ways this community is working to address these issues. What is affecting their success? Are there ways they could be more successful?

Sustainability Innovations

Severn’s work in the Amazon began when she was just a young girl, and she was catapulted into focusing on the impact of sustainability in her life. Today there are many organizations and companies working to save the rainforest. [Amazon Conservation](#)⁴ is one of the main organizations that highlights the threats to the Amazon, while actively combining manpower and technology to find solutions to the problems.

Severn is famous for “stopping the world” for 5 minutes in 1992 at the United Nations Earth Summit; but she knows that the voices of kids today are just as important as her voice was then. Visit [her website](#)⁵ to listen to her original speech, and the anniversary of it, which highlights students today who feel like “I’m only a child but...”

Deforestation has become a growing issue globally, not just in the Amazon. This [article](#)⁶ highlights 8 different ways that you can contribute to the reduction of deforestation. How can you get involved in stopping deforestation?

As a society we are constantly looking for ways to improve our Earth; some organizations have found success and withstood the test of time. Since 1996, [Amazon Watch](#)² has evolved and found successful ways to assist in the fight against deforestation, and utilize advanced Indigenous solutions to addressing these issues.

Sustainability Career Pathways

Science Communicator. Severn's father, David Suzuki, was a famous scientist and science communicator. Too few scientists are able to take the time to translate their complex understandings into language that the public can understand and be moved by. This field requires a lot of studying--of both science and communications--so is an intense one. But it can be very rewarding as well. Read more about [the field of science communications](#)⁸ and [this Nature article](#)⁹ about one academic who made the switch to science communications.

Environmental Lawyer. Severn is supporting youth as they sue Canada in order to protect the climate. Lawyers are central in this fight. Perhaps this is the path for you? Here is a brief overview of [what an environmental lawyer is](#)¹⁰, [how to become one](#)¹¹, and [a guide to careers in Environmental Law](#)¹².

Nonprofit Director. Many people work for nonprofit organizations; some, like Severn, even direct nonprofits. If this is your ambition, keep in mind that you may benefit from getting management training. There are programs to train managers for nonprofit organizations specifically. While many of these are masters' levels programs ([such as these leading programs](#))¹³, there are also informal and undergraduate opportunities to learn essential management skills as well. If you're really serious about this path, [here's a 500+ page introduction to the field!](#)¹⁴

1 <https://kahoot.com/>

2 https://serc.carleton.edu/earthlabs/carbon/lab_4.html

3 https://www.teachengineering.org/activities/view/cub_waterqtnew_lesson01_activity1

4 <https://www.amazonconservation.org/>

5 <https://severncullissuzuki.com/bio/>

6 <https://innovate-eco.com/8-innovative-solutions-to-deforestation/>

7 <https://amazonwatch.org/work>

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_communication

9 <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02387-w>

10 <https://www.environmentalscience.org/career/environmental-lawyer>

11 <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/cool-schools-2017/how-be-environmental-lawyer>

12 <https://hls.harvard.edu/content/uploads/2008/07/full-working-draft.pdf>

13 <https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-public-affairs-schools/nonprofit-management-rankings>

14 <https://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1119585457/stansociinn09-20>

