Malta's Schools Love #OurOcean

Educator's Guidelines

Dear Educator,

The #OurOcean 2017 Conference will take place in Malta on 5-6 October 2017. This high-level international conference aims to safeguard the future health and prosperity of our ocean.

The European Commission, with the support of the Maltese Ministry of Education, has launched the **Malta's Schools Love #OurOcean** project from January 2017 to the end of May 2017 to raise awareness about the protection of our ocean and to involve school age children in the conference itself. The most engaged schools will be invited to present their initiatives at the conference, becoming "ocean ambassadors" of Malta.

This brief guide has been created to assist and inspire you as you accompany your students on an exciting and enriching journey to discover and learn about our ocean. By following the suggested four phases described below, you will work with your students as they reflect upon their relationship with the ocean, identify the problems our ocean is facing, design their own initiative to confront a chosen issue, and finally implement the initiative in their very own community.

We encourage you to take lots of photos and/or videos of your students as they are implementing their project – throughout the preparation and up to the big event, whatever it may be. Besides being good memories for you and your students, you will need these photos and videos to send to Malta's Schools **Love #OurOcean** at the close of the project in May. You can also post them on #OurOcean Facebook and Twitter from day one, with the hashtag #OurOcean.

We hope these guidelines are helpful to you and your class as you design your own local initiative and put it into action! Please feel free to contact us with any queries. And most importantly, have fun!

The Malta's Schools Love #OurOcean team
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PHASE 1:

The ocean in my life, the ocean in our world

The main objective of Malta's Schools Love #OurOcean is simple – in fact, the name says it all. Malta's Schools Love #OurOcean begins with a personal journey, during which students reflect on their own relationships with our ocean. As the educator, you'll help guide this reflection and we hope you'll be pleased to see how easily the classroom discussion begins to flow!

A good starting point could be to ask students to think about the great times they have enjoyed at the sea with friends and family. Students could also think about different or deeper connections to the sea and whether the Maltese as islanders share a unique relationship with their surrounding waters. Then shift the focus to what they'd like to experience with the ocean in the future: Sailing adventures? Scuba diving? Whale watching? Or maybe just more fun times at the beach as parents with their own children?

PHASE 2:

Identifying challenges

By this point, students will have done a lot of thinking about our ocean and are hopefully feeling closer to it. Now is the time for them to look at the different challenges our ocean is facing, and choose the one they wish to help tackle.

As you work with your students to select their challenge, help them to choose one that is having a local effect – marine litter and sustainable seafood are good options. Alternatively, they may wish to increase their local community's ocean literacy. You can find more information about these topics at the end of these guidelines.

You'll probably want your students to carry out some in-depth research on their chosen topic. Different research points could include the history of the problem; its local, European and global effects; the projected outcome if the problem is not solved; different solutions to the problem already being implemented; the specific problems posed by marine issues etc.

Example activity: Ask the students to find a news story about a human activity that has had a damaging effect on our ocean and share summaries of the news stories during class.

PHASE 3:

Finding solutions

Once the students have agreed on a challenge and done their research, you can work with them as they develop their own action to help tackle the problem. This could be a local awareness raising initiative, a specific action such as cleaning up a beach in the area, or something far more involved and complex. Encourage your students to be creative!

It's time for some major brainstorming! As the moderator, you may need to help steer general ideas until they become more specific. For example, if the students want to organise a beach clean-up, ask them about which beach they will choose, how they will raise awareness of the event, and what they plan to do with the collected waste!

Once the students have agreed on a solution, you can guide them to develop it by asking them about the specific actions they will they take; how they will raise awareness of their initiative; what local collaborations/synergies can be made (local NGOs, businesses, the town hall, community leaders, etc.); how will they verify that their action has been successful, etc. They should also identify who needs to be made aware of their action, such as the municipal government, waste collectors, the local marina…

By the end of this phase, students should be able to describe what they will do and how it will have a positive effect in a couple of sentences. This will help ensure all students stay on the same track.

PHASE 4:

Taking action!

Congratulations! You've helped your students to define a problem and develop a solution. Now it's time to put ideas into action. After the work of the last phases, your students are probably ready to create a clear "roadmap" and actually implement their initiative!

THREE KEY FOCUS AREAS

Our ocean faces many challenges, but two of the most urgent are **seafood sustainability** and **marine litter**. You may wish to focus on one of these topics with your students. Another key focus area is **ocean literacy**. By increasing knowledge of our ocean and awareness of the crucial role it plays in all our lives, you can encourage your local community members to take actions for our ocean in their own lives. Here are some helpful resources for each of these three key focus areas.

1) Seafood sustainability
Humans need to eat fish, wild or farmed, but production methods must respect the ecosystems in which these species live, the communities that depend on fishing for their livelihood, and the overall health of our ocean and thus the whole world. Many legal instruments are in place in the EU to reach that objective. In particular in the Mediterranean, minimum legal sizes have been put in place to ensure that fish have time to grow and reproduce before being caught. We can also help by making the right choices at the market: choosing a lesser-known fish takes some of the pressure off more commonly consumed species. Choosing farmed fish rather than caught can have the same effect.

Challenge questions for students:
• Fish size is a key factor to ensure sustainable fishing. Why?
• Which lesser-known species do you/your family consume?
• How can we help promote sustainable fishing in our own community?
• What are some actions we can take at individual level against unsustainable seafood?

Helpful resources:
Fish4Tomorrow: www.fish4tomorrow.com/
European Commission INSEPARABLE Campaign: https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/inseparable/en
MedFish4Ever: https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/inseparable/en/medfish4ever

2) Marine litter
Marine litter is human-created waste that has accidentally or intentionally entered our oceans or other waterways. Every year, millions of tons of marine litter end up in our oceans, the vast majority being plastic. This plastic has a whole spectrum of negative effects on our ocean and marine species, great and small, which eat the plastics and suffer poor health or death as a result. The issue of "plastic soup", which occurs when plastics break down to a microscopic level and are consumed by microbes and other tiny species, is of particular concern.

Challenge questions for students:
• What are some sources of marine litter?
• What are some different types of marine litter?
• Have you seen marine litter on Malta's beaches or in other places? While diving?
• What are the potential effects of marine litter of fish and other animal species?
• What are its potential effects on our food supplies?
• What are some local actions that could be taken against marine litter?

Helpful resources:
Project Aware: www.projectaware.org/?q=/homepage/project-aware-homepage
Let's Do It Malta: www.letsdoitworld.org/country/malta/
Clean Sea Life: www.cleansealife.it/

3) Ocean literacy
Ocean literacy is our knowledge of the ocean in regard to issues such as the different ecosystems that are found in the ocean, the health and sustainability of the ocean, and our own relationship with the ocean – at a personal, community and global level. Increasing ocean literacy can influence people to behave differently in their own lives, and to help better care for and protect the ocean.

Challenge questions for students:
• What are some different ways that the ocean benefits our communities and world?
• What has happened to the monk seals?
• Has Malta always been an island?
• Why are tears salty?
• What is a seiche (or il-Milghuba in Maltese)? How have they impacted Malta?
• What are Marine Protected Areas?

Helpful resources:
Sea Change Project: http://www.seachangeproject.eu/
The Malta Maritime Museum: http://heritagemalta.org/projects/eu-funded-projects/
The National Aquarium: http://www.aquarium.com.mt/research-conservation/
Nature Trust Malta: http://www.naturetrustmalta.org/what-we-do/