

# Aktivität 3.10. Der Rat aller Wesen<sup>1</sup>

## Cultural Background

In vielen Bundesländern Deutschlands überwiegen die Städte und die Natur ist rar gesät. Viele Menschen müssen weite Wege auf sich nehmen, um Natururlaub zu genießen und zu erleben. Die existentielle Bedeutung der Natur für den Menschen gerät zu oft in Vergessenheit. Unser Ökosystem leidet unter der rücksichtslosen Behandlung durch den Menschen. Wälder werden abgeholzt, Seen kippen um, Fische sterben, Wildtiere verlieren ihre Behausungen etc. Darum ist es heutzutage umso wichtiger, sich vor Augen zu führen, was Tiere und Pflanzen für eine Rolle spielen und dass sie ein wichtiger Teil der Erhaltung aller Lebewesen sind.

Es ist wichtig, dass Schülerinnen und Schüler sich bewusst werden, dass sie nicht die einzigen Lebewesen auf der Erde sind und dass Biologie ein weit gefächertes Fach ist.

## In Waldsee

*Der Rat aller Wesen* has been an integral part of Waldsee's *Grüne Welle* environmental program and has become part of International Day at Concordia Language Villages. This activity fits well with Waldsee's environmental adventure program and typically takes place at the end of the intensive two-week program. Villagers are given the opportunity to draw on what they have learned and to reflect on the status of the natural world. In preparation for this activity, villagers choose a being of the natural world, which they will represent at the council gathering (*der Rat aller Wesen*). They research and reflect on the current status of their being in the ecosystem earth and then prepare a short written statement from the viewpoint of their chosen being. The villagers construct a mask using primarily materials found in nature to represent their being during the council. As the beings gather for the council, the participants wearing the masks speak in the voice of their being and report on their status in the world as well as express their hopes for the future.

## In the Classroom

In this activity, each student creates a mask with which they represent an animal (human or nonhuman) part of nature or a landscape of their choice. Students can also represent categories of plants and animals such as predators or needle-bearing trees. They collect information on the specific animal or plant. They then create a small speech in German in favor of their chosen representative. At the council, each participant speaks on behalf of their being and shares their thoughts, fears and hopes with the council members. Holding the *Rat aller Wesen* outdoors, such as in

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from John Seed, Joanna Macy, Pat Flemming and Arena Naess, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of All Beings* (Philadelphia, PA and Santa Cruz, CA: New Society Publishers, 1988).

the school woods, near a pond, or in a nearby part adds to the atmosphere of this event. Of course, it is also possible to create an appropriate atmosphere for the council in your classroom. It is necessary to allocate enough time for the preparations for the council: we suggest a minimum of three class periods for the preparations, including choosing a *Wesen*, making the masks, and preparing the being's speech at the council.

### **Objectives**

- **Communication**
  - Students will learn how to and practice structuring their thoughts and forming complete sentences in German.
  - Students will learn and practice German language structures and vocabulary and construction to describe various beings and their role in the world.
  - Students will express opinions and discuss various topics.
- **Comparisons**
  - Students will compare the role of various beings in the earth's ecosystem.
- **Culture**
  - Students will learn and reflect on the impact of humans on the ecosystem.
- **Connections**
  - Students will learn and reflect of the intricate connections between animals and plants in the ecosystem.
  - Students will create awareness about the importance of conserving and protecting our ecosystem
  - Students will identify areas in which they can improve their personal behavior and interaction in and towards nature.
- **Communities**
  - Students will build community through a performance-based team project.

### **Language Functions in Focus**

- Comparing and contrasting
- Evaluating
- Describing objects
- Presenting information
- Expressing opinions
- Giving reasons and expressing causality
- Narrating
- Introducing oneself
- Introducing someone else

## **Materials**

- A quiet place outdoors or in a building for students to be able to collect their thoughts and later to discuss
- A drum

## **Mask-making**

*Note: It is best if students collect their own materials from the outdoor environment in which their being resides.*

- Materials found in nature such as leaves, bark, twigs, hollow trunk pieces, feathers, moss, lichen, grasses, rocks, sand, etc.
- Paper, cardboard
- Glue and scissors
- Thin wire and string
- Paint
- Materials for making plaster or paper masks

## **Preparation**

This activity involves individual prep time as well as class discussion. Do some Internet research or go out in nature and find an example of plants and give students an example on how to speak in favor of a chosen representative such as an animal or plant. It might be helpful to provide students with important phrases and or vocabulary that will help structure their thoughts and make a case for their representative.

## **Generating Interest**

You may want to have your students do a practice round in which you assign each student the same plant or animal and they all have to come up with ideas on how to speak in favor for that plant or animal. You may also consider first doing Activity 3.9, *ein Lebensnetz*, to have students review the concept of how all beings are interconnected and dependent on each other in the ecosystem earth. That activity can set the tone for this activity.

## **Presentation and Practice**

### Step 1

Gather the students in a circle and welcome them to the “*besonderen Vorbereitungen auf den Rat aller Wesen.*” Help them understand that a Council of Beings is “*eine Versammlung der Wesen, um den Zustand der Erde und seiner Wesen zu beklagen und zu beratschlagen.*” Explain the Council of All Beings (*den Rat aller Wesen*) so that students know what is going to happen. Highlight that silence in between the spoken word of other Council members is an integral part of the sanctity of the Council.

Ask the following questions to begin a discussion of the status of the beings:

- *Wie viele Organismen gibt es auf der Erde? Wissen wir das?*
- *Gibt es Organismen, die einfach von einem Tag zum anderen verschwinden?*
- *Warum verschwinden oder sterben Organismen aus?*

Place a German list of endangered species in the middle and ask your students:

- *Was bedeutet diese Liste von Namen?*
- *Warum sind sie vom Aussterben bedroht?*
- *Was für ein Verhältnis haben wir zu unserer Umwelt?*

## Step 2

End the discussion with a portion of Chief Seattle's speech from 1854 to his tribal assembly in the Pacific Northwest to help the students reflect on how we interact with the beings of our environment.

*Lehrt Eure Kinder, was wir unsere Kinder gelehrt haben, dass die Erde unsere Mutter ist.*

*Was immer der Erde widerfährt, widerfährt den Söhnen und Töchtern der Erde.*

*Wenn Menschen auf den Boden spucken, spucken sie auf sich selbst.*

*Wir sind ein Teil der Erde und sie ist ein Teil von uns.*

*Die duftenden Blumen sind unsere Schwestern, das Reh, das Pferd, der große Adler - sind unsere Brüder.*

*Die felsigen Höhen, die saftigen Wiesen, die Körperwärme des Ponys und der Mensch - all das gehört zur gleichen Familie.*

*Häuptling Seattle, 1854*

After the quotes, ask the students what the term "Wesen" might mean to Chief Seattle.

- *Ist ein Wesen nur ein Organismus, oder kann es auch etwas anderes sein?*

## Step 3: Choosing a Wesen

Now take the students outside if possible, perhaps to a nearby park, forest or the school yard. Allow and encourage students to sit or lie down in the way they feel most comfortable. Ask them to spread out far enough to not become distracted by their classmates. Invite them to close their eyes and let their imaginations take them to an animal (human or nonhuman), or part of nature or landscape. Remind them to let the being visit them in their thoughts, rather than to force themselves to think about a specific animal or part of nature.

Invite the students to “become” the being that has visited them in their imaginations. Encourage them to feel themselves turning into the animal or part of nature like a cloud or a mountain or a tree or another human. Ask them: “What is happening to me as this being? How do I feel? What is my life like? My days? My nights? My interactions with beings? With my environment? What do I want? What do I have to say? What would I like to tell people? what wisdom do I have as this being?” Encourage them to find the answers within themselves. Have them take notes on what their being may want to say and share about its role in the web of life, its plight, its fears and its hopes for the future when it gathers with the other beings at the council.

#### Step 4: The making of the masks

After allowing the students some time to really “become” their being, ask them to bring materials from home or from the outdoors to create and decorate their masks. Bring the art supplies and ask students to build a mask representing themselves as the being. It is important to understand that the mask does not need to look like the actual being, it needs to feel like it is representative. Participants might be tempted to spend a long time on their mask, remind them that the mask is only a representation and give minute and one-minute warnings to finish the masks. Have fun with it! *Dabei sprechen wir deutsch, natürlich!*

#### Step 5: *Der Rat aller Wesen*

Establish your location for where the *Wesen* will gather. Instruct the *Wesen*, who are now wearing their costumes and masks, silently to form a circle when they hear the beating of the drum.

Once the circle has been established, welcome participants to the *Rat aller Wesen*. Traditionally in the Council of All Beings, the leader will take a moment to read the above portion of Chief Seattle’s 1854 speech. You may choose to read this speech again (which would be familiar to your students from the preparations) or you could pick a German poem or song to recite as an opening to the ceremonies.

While the rest of the group listens attentively, each member in turn speaks in the voice of their *Wesen*, telling who they are, where they reside, their place in the web of life, and their possible plight on earth.

*z.B. Ich bin der Seelachs. Ich lebe so wohl im Frischwasser, auch im Seewasser. Ich werde gefressen von den Bären auf dem Weg nach Hause, dort wo ich meine Eier ablege. Menschen fangen mich in großen Mengen im Meer und auch in den Flüssen. Es gibt viele Probleme für mich. Die Bäche werden verschmutzt und zerstört von den Menschen. Turbinen töten mich. Menschen töten mich. Manche meiner Geschwister sind schon ausgestorben.*

The Council should respond to every being by saying, “*Wir hören Sie*, (name of being)”, after they are done introducing themselves. The leader may give a nod to

the *Wesen* saying “*Wir danken Dir für deine Worte und deine Weisheit*, before indicating that the next *Wesen* should speak.

After each *Wesen* has spoken, beat the drum and ask the group, “*Wie stellst du dir die Zukunft vor?* Each *Wesen* answers in turn.

z.B. Als Seelachs *wünsche ich mir, dass die Menschen einen sicheren Umweg um die Turbinen schaffen und meine Laichplätze nicht mehr zerstören.*

The Council should again respond to every being by saying, “*Wir hören Sie*, (name of being)”. The leader may also again say “*Wir danken Dir für deine Worte und deine Weisheit.*”

After the last *Wesen* has spoken, check your students for comprehension. This would be a time when the *Wesen* can teach the group about themselves using a combination of German and English. This can be guided with questions from the teacher or other students, or the *Wesen* themselves can provide the group with relevant points from their talk.

Thank each *Wesen* for their presence and their words, *Vielen Dank für Eure Teilnahme an unserem Rat und euren weisen Worten.*

Close the circle and the *Rat* with a German poem, or repeat the Chief Seattle poem or another poem or song. Beat the drum and instruct your students to remove their masks and walk away from the circle the way they entered.

### ***Adaptation***

If you are not able to offer the full experience of a Council of All Beings, have your students prepare short oral or written presentations from the perspective of another being. Asking your students to do so gives them the opportunity for empathy. It also reinforces a number of language functions as outlined above.