

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY? A DEFINITION FOR ILLINOIS.

Environmental Literacy is:

- » The understanding of our environment (who and what surrounds us)
- » The building of relationships between the human and non-human
- » The ability to see that everything is interrelated; one aspect of the natural world influences and is influenced by other aspects of the natural world
- » Understanding that humans are part of the natural world--not over it

Equitable environmental literacy can begin with our individual cultures, identities, abilities, interests, and our own connection to the environment and can be based on our lived experiences. Understanding that everyone has a right to high-quality environmental education and a healthy and just environment is the foundation on which equitable environmental literacy must be built.

KEY TENETS OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

There is no single path to achieving environmental literacy. By focusing on the following principles, knowledge, beliefs, and actions, however, educators and learners will advance environmental literacy for themselves and their community.

1. Understanding of Community
2. Awareness of the Environment
3. Connection to the Environment
4. Understanding of Environmental Justice
5. Civic Engagement focused on Environmental Action
6. Access to Climate Change Education and an Understanding of Climate Science
7. Understanding of Sustainability, Adaptability and Resilience

EQUITY IN ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

Environmental equity describes a country, or world, in which no single group or community faces disadvantages in dealing with environmental hazards, disasters, or pollution. It also means access to environmental benefits, regardless of income, race, and other characteristics. Historical inequities must be acknowledged and addressed while foregrounding those most marginalized by environmental literacy. Environmental equity is a basic human right.

ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY RELIES ON

- A common understanding of key concepts in social justice and social equity issues and how those relate to environmental literacy and environmental education implementation.
- Utilizing and implementing different approaches to incorporating environmental education into diverse communities.
- Building partnerships to advance environmental literacy goals instead of working in isolation.
- Understanding what and how to evaluate levels of environmental literacy and program impacts on participants.
- Being familiar with and utilizing resources that are already available.