

GREENER

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Challenge

Start the challenge by watching this beautiful and inspirational [video](#) from our partner, [Conservation International](#) – “*Shailene Woodley is Forest*”. If you were moved by this film, think about how you take that inspiration and turn it into action.

Then, check out this [video](#) from environmentalist and author, Paul Hawken talking about the unstoppable movement of people and organizations dedicated to restoring the environment and fostering social justice. Here’s where you come in.

- **When you look across your campus or community, do you see any social injustices? It may be something you’ve observed but don’t know how to deal with, a concept you want to further explore, an issue that is important at this moment in time. Whatever you are thinking about, share your thoughts and observations.**

Yes. My school’s campus is in downtown Montreal, where there are many homeless Indigenous people. In particular, there is one First Nations couple that I see nearly every day right in front of the campus gates. Even when I used to visit Montreal when I was younger, I saw this same couple. They are visible alcoholics, and I have seen their problem getting worse and worse as time goes by. It’s a really harsh reality check each time I walk onto campus. My biggest wake-up call comes when I walk past their ‘home’ right after I’ve had an environmental council meeting, where my teammates and I have just excitedly discussed our new campaign ideas. I then see this couple sitting there, drunk at 1 pm in the afternoon, and I’m reminded that their ancestors used to be the preservers of the land before they were kicked off it and their ecosystems were ruined. I consider this social issue to be a social injustice.

- **What is the one that resonates most with you?**

COLONIALISM OF ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATIONISM

- **Write a reflection about that injustice and why it matters.**

Ever since I’ve gotten involved in the environmental movement, I’ve seen many counts of colonialism of the idea of ecological conservationism. Although the original protectors and keepers of the Earth were Indigenous, the idea of stewardship is being re-written as a new, cool idea.

I consider this an injustice because Indigenous opinions are continuously de-validated and struck down on all levels in Canada – educational, social, political, even cultural. For example, Canada’s First Nations populations suffer more social issues like alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, rape, kidnapping, murder, illiteracy, lack of access to electricity and safe water, and youth homelessness than any other Canadian demographic, and yet their community Elders’ pleas and cases for help from our government continue to be ignored.

When what was once an Aboriginal way of living in harmony with the planet becomes colonised and treated as a fad via greenwashed marketing campaigns, it just upsets me to see the injustice in how we mistreat Canada’s original peoples while using their philosophies, pawned off as our own new ideas of “eco-friendly living” with no credit to these marginalised groups.

- **Think about how you might become proactive and become a changemaker. What might already be happening on your campus or community (a group, club, non-profit org) or do you need to start your own club?**
 1. There are already a few organisations on campus which exist to provide support to Indigenous students. Some of these include the Indigenous Student Alliance, First Peoples’ House, Indigenous Affairs Work Group, and the Indigenous Education Programme, and they all provide resources to offer financial, educational, and social support to First Nations or Metis students.
 2. We just finished a campus-wide Indigenous Awareness Week (IAW) last week. Although I think that there is a lot of intersection between environmentalism and social equity regarding Indigenous-Canada relations, there wasn’t much discussion throughout the IAW. I would have loved to see some representation of First Nations ecological advocacy, so I plan to speak with the IAW organisers to possibly plan for something next year.
 3. As a member of my residence’s Residence Hall Council and the First-Year Environmental Residence Council, I had to attend a council orientation session during which we discussed the idea of colonialism at University. During the discussion, as the Vice-President on the council, I brought up my thoughts on environmental colonialism. The other council-members were totally on board with what I was saying, and so we decided to commit to a few outreach activities as a Council over the course of the year.

- **Tell us how you take on your issue and create an action plan to address it. Share your next steps.**

My plan to address this issue is not to create a trade-off between Indigenous ecological activism and regular environmentalism. Both streams have one common goal: to preserve and protect nature, and so it would be against both our aspirations to cut the other group out of the movement. However, I think that people must give more acknowledgement to the existence of Indigenous activism, and must give more credit to it.

I don't think that I would be able to (or that it would be appropriate for me to) start my own club to advocate for Indigenous issues. I don't think it is my place to take that role from a person of First Nations heritage, but I am definitely ready to be in an alliance to raise awareness about the importance of Indigenous environmentalism. In partnership with McGill's Indigenous Students Alliance, I would like to approach this social injustice from an ecological perspective, from a point of common interest, and spread awareness about the importance of acknowledging the keepers of the land before our arrival. Ultimately, I think that we need to take care to not usurp or undermine the validity of Indigenous ecological spirituality. What we know today as "environmentalism" has been around for millennia, and I want to restore value to Aboriginal conservation efforts and environmental stewardship.

David Suzuki once said, *Aboriginal people, not environmentalists, are our best bet for protecting the planet*, and I'd like to play a part in reminding fellow environmentalists of that by hosting awareness campaigns, supporting Indigenous grassroots movements, helping to amplify First Nations voices, and doing what I can to share the wave of the movement with people from marginalised groups.

My next step is to get involved in the Indigenous Students Alliance to gain insight on these social injustices from an inside perspective and to get further insight into how I can help alleviate the unfairness on small and large scales.