TROPICAL DILEMMAS

IN BRIEF
Through a focused discussion of rain forest issues, students will identify conflicting values involved in Tropical Dilemmas. They will attempt to decide what action to take or create alternative solutions.

MATERIALS
Dilemma Cards—1 set per group of four students—See pages 26–27

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Rain forest issues cannot be solved with simplistic solutions. What works in one country might not work in another. Students grappling with tropical dilemmas might be frustrated by the lack of simple or “correct” answers.

DIRECTIONS
1. Give each group a stack of dilemma cards, placed face down. Tell the first person in each group to draw a card and study the situation for one minute.

2. Explain that when the first person is ready, he or she should read the card aloud to the group, give a decision, and explain his or her reasons. Encourage students to create their own solutions. Other group members should comment on the dilemma and explain what they would decide.

3. Continue the process so that each member has at least one chance to draw a card from the set.

TAKING IT FURTHER
1. Encourage students to create additional tropical rain forest dilemma cards.

2. Tell the groups to debate their answers in an attempt to reach a consensus, an answer that everyone agrees with. To start, have each member write down his or her answer. The person who picked the card then gives an answer and gives the reasoning behind it to persuade the others. After a brief discussion, individuals should again write down a choice from the answers. Keep a tally of the number of students that agree for each dilemma. Ask them to decide which method is easier, consensus or majority rule.
You are on a field trip with your class to the zoo. Although you know that it is against the rules for the visitors to feed the animals, some of your friends are feeding snacks to the parrots in the rain forest section. Should you:

- ask them to stop; snacks might hurt the parrots and more will have to be taken from the rain forest
- report them to the nearest zoo keeper
- tell the teacher
- join them in feeding the animals
- not worry; parrots in zoos are bred in captivity
- other

You are the president of a company that grows tropical fruit in a rain forest country. You learn that you must cut more rain forest to meet the increased demand for tropical fruits in the United States. If you don’t expand, you will not have jobs for local workers. Should you:

- cancel the expansion and not hire new workers
- cut the rain forest, but donate money to groups that work to save rain forests
- explain to company shareholders that there won’t be any profits because you don’t want to destroy the rain forest
- other

You love the hamburgers at Burger Barn, but your teacher says that Burger Barn buys beef from areas that used to be rain forest. You also read that if the demand and price for rain forest beef goes down, ranchers there will have to clear even more rain forest to make up the difference. Should you:

- become a vegetarian
- switch to another fast-food chain
- continue to eat at Burger Barn
- not worry; rain forest beef is in a lot of food
- give money to organizations that develop new crops that don’t harm rainforests
- other

You find out that your state government has just ordered new desks and chairs for their offices that are made from tropical woods. Should you:

- forget about it, the order has already been made
- write a letter to the governor and ask that the order be cancelled
- find out if the wood is from one of the plantations that grows tropical woods on a sustained basis
- call local television stations and newspapers with the story and how the city is helping to destroy tropical rain forests
- other

It’s your parents’ anniversary next week. Your dad excitedly shows you what he bought your mom on his last business trip overseas: a beautifully carved table inlaid with different tropical woods. Should you:

- say how beautiful it is and that she’ll love it
- tell him that rain forest trees were cut down to make it
- think about how the person who made it was glad to have the money for their family
- other
You enjoy eating bananas, but you know that banana plantations are located in areas cleared of rain forest and treated with pesticides that endanger the health of plantation workers. Bananas grown organically cost twice as much. Do you:

- keep eating bananas, because the people in tropical countries need jobs that pay well
- pay more for the organically grown bananas
- quit eating bananas
- other

Your class has been recycling to raise money to help save tropical forests. Should you:

- give it to an international organization that educates people about rain forests
- give it to your local zoo or conservatory that gives tropical animals and plants a place to live and teaches people about the tropical forests
- buy and protect five acres of rain forest preserve
- send it to an organization that is researching better ways to grow crops in rain forests
- help a group of native people protect their home
- help sponsor a rain forest research project
- other

You are an exchange student visiting a tropical rain forest country. A new friend, who has lived in deep poverty all of her life, runs up to you one day and tells you her father has won the chance to move out to the edge of the rain forest and start a farm. Should you:

- tell her you will miss her and ask if you can visit
- tell her not to go because cutting down rain forests is bad for the environment, and the soil won’t last very long anyway
- congratulate her and ask if you can help
- other

Mother’s Day is approaching and you and your brother and sister have decided to buy a present together. Your sister has purchased a palm tree that you know your mom will love, but you know palms come from tropical rain forests. Should you:

- say nothing; after all, you can’t send it back
- demand your money back from your sister
- go to the garden center to find out whether the plant was grown in a local greenhouse or taken from a tropical rain forest
- congratulate your sister for helping the economy of a rain forest country
- other

Your mother works for a multinational automobile corporation. One day you find a flier on the windshield of your car, claiming that the corporation is responsible for cutting down tropical rain forests. It asks you to sign the card and send it to the president of the company telling them to stop. Do you:

- keep it from her, but sign and mail it anyway
- show your mom and ask her to find another company to work for
- throw it away—you know your mom is concerned about rain forests too, but she’d only get in trouble and it wouldn’t make any difference
- other

You are at an international student exchange conference. You meet a student from a country that is rapidly losing its rain forests. You say you are concerned about rain forests. He says rich nations are responsible because they finance development projects to keep making things you want. Do you:

- agree and apologize
- stop consuming so much and buy less
- promise you will not buy rain forest products
- ignore the remark, but recycle more
- write to your senators and representatives and tell them to stop funding those projects
- other