

# ALTERNATIVE TOPICS AVAILABLE FOR STEPPING STONES DIVISIONS

## **Children in Need 2010**

Throughout the world places exist where acts of man & acts of nature have conspired to create well over 100 million orphans who struggle to survive every day. Poverty & suffering are caused by famine, disease, poor economic conditions, social decay, lack of social infrastructure, & natural disasters. Whatever the reason, the results are the same...innocent children with no parents, no home, & diminished chances of survival. While some live on the streets, others live in doorways, makeshift tents, even underground sewers for protection from the elements...alone & scared. Many live in crumbling orphanages where the children's food, medicine, & clothing reflect governments' meager contribution. What can be done to change the conditions for these children? What will their future be? How do these situations affect the world as a whole? If we truly believe that children are our future, what can be done to generate sustainable opportunities for these children? Who should take the lead in creating these opportunities - nonprofits, governments, or businesses?

## **Climate Threat 2006**

A leading climate scientist warns "the climate change problem will be more serious by 2050 ..." & "noticeable deterioration of the US climate could be apparent in decades." Rapid & major climate change could bring extensive ruin. Four possible regional scenarios: much drier summers in the mid-continent of North America & Eurasia, disappearance of the Arctic ice cap, collapse of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, & disruption of the Atlantic ice currents that warm Europe. How can these issues be addressed?

## **Coral Reefs 2012**

Coral reefs are sometimes known as "the rainforests of the sea." Reefs are some of the world's great tropical and sub-tropical ecosystems & they support the livelihoods of millions of people. Worldwide, already 25 percent of coral reefs have been destroyed or badly degraded & some scientist predict that by 2020 up to 70% might be permanently lost. These are areas rich in marine species that are found only in a small area. Therefore, they are highly vulnerable to extinction. They supply seafood, building materials, sources for medicinal products, & draw in much needed tourism revenue. Reefs also protect shorelines & communities from storms & erosion. Coral reefs are deeply threatened by human activities & global climate change. Coral reefs are an important source of food for hundreds of millions of people, many of whom have no other source of animal protein. However, especially reefs in developing countries are threatened & if human impact on reefs is not reduced there is a great danger that some of the world's poorest people will lose an important source of nutrition and in many cases, their livelihoods.

## **Cultural Prejudice 2007**

Given all that is happening in our world, maybe it's time to revisit this most basic but yet vital aspect of how living beings see and treat each other. We live in culturally diverse nations so we can expect contact with people who are different. Business and personal contacts take us out of our immediate neighborhoods, states, and nations. Modern transportation shrinks our world and new technology gives instant communication with distant strangers. We must be thinkers who accept differences and make fair evaluations. Will cultural prejudice continue to be a societal factor in the future?

## **Depletion of Oceanic Species 2005**

Fish and seafood are the primary food sources for millions of people around the world. They are seen as an essential ingredient of a healthy diet. Atlantic cod have been harvested almost to extinction. Orange Roughy were almost totally depleted before anyone discovered they take 25 years to reach sexual maturity. The breeding stock has been taken and this is likely to become an endangered species. The same thing is happening in the Antarctic with the Sawtooth. Fish around the world are becoming endangered, putting the lives of many in jeopardy. Is it possible to reverse the damage before it's too late?

## **Desertification 2014**

Desertification describes the desert-like conditions that exist in regions, often as a cause of human interaction with the environment. According to the United Nations Development Programme, "Over 40 percent of the world is drylands, where about 2.3 billion people live in nearly 100 countries." Drylands are defined as regions where rainfall is low and evaporation is high. Desertification is one of the most serious ecosystem changes facing people who live in poverty. Two-thirds of the world's poor live in areas that are susceptible to desertification, and over half of them depend on the land for their livelihoods. Many of desertification's causes are human in nature (deforestation, overgrazing, poor irrigation systems, changes in population density), but the problem can also be exacerbated as severe weather events increase in frequency and severity due to climate

changes. The continued degradation of dry-lands results in a 'feedback loop': the arid land exposes carbon captured in the soil and releases it into the atmosphere with significant consequences on global climate systems, in turn, leading to desertification. As human interference and climate change continue to cause land degradation, how will governments and land landowners respond to the ever-changing condition of their lands? What will be the effect on lifestyles and livelihoods as changes resulting from desertification occur?

### **Energy of the Future – 2016 International Topic**

Global energy needs are great and will continue to rise along with technological advances and population growth. Alternative energies are being developed, but often with unforeseen negative impacts as a by-product. Many questions remain to be answered:

- Which technologies will be critical to generate, transmit, and store energy in the future?
- Can energy be harvested from the environment and humans wearing devices?
- Will falling costs of geothermal, wind, solar, and biomass energy impact the economic balance of the energy industry?
- Will scientists be able to improve the capture and storage of the vast amounts of solar energy?
- Could innovation convert older energy sources into new “green” technology?
- Will the sources of energy become more diverse or will efficiency improve existing sources to the point that fewer types of energy will be needed?

### **Enhancing Human Potential 2015**

Through the use of performance enhancing drugs, personal trainers, speed-enhancing swimsuits, technologies for body and brain, people can enhance their potential in physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities. As time goes on, humans will be offered even more ways to enhance their potential in unprecedented ways: cybernetic body parts, memory-enhancing or erasing drugs, technologically advanced sports equipment, and/or human/computer interfaces, etc. Will the definition of “human” change?

Many ethical issues surround these advances: Should sports people be able to enhance their performances in any way they like? Should parents be able to choose IQ or mood boosters such as drugs or brain implants for their children? What impacts might exist with the disparities between the “haves” and the “have-nots?” How far might the human brain and body be pushed? To what extent can we “perfect” the human body? What “enhancers” do we have presently? What are the dangers, as well as benefits, of powerful new technologies that might radically change the lives of human beings?

### **Healthy Living 2011**

Fast foods, convenience foods, stress...all of these are affecting our lives today, resulting in a generation of people with disorders that were unknown twenty-five years ago. Stress-related illnesses - broken sleep patterns, obesity, lack of physical exercise, ADHD, mood swings and other psychological conditions - seem to all be part and parcel of the intensity at which people are living today. What impact will these have on the lives of the next generations?

### **Human Rights 2012**

Since the end of World War II, many people have prioritized the protection of human rights around the world. But what exactly are human rights? Do they vary depending on religion and culture? Many western countries criticize the Islamic world for its treatment of women, while the United States is often condemned for its use of the death penalty. Can one nation fight to protect human rights in another nation, and if so, how? What challenges do globalization and the prevention of terrorism present to the preservation of human rights in the future?

### **Impact of Social Media 2015**

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, Second Life, wikis, blogging, tweeting – all of these words have entered our lives in the last few years. The impact of Web 2.0 and the rise of associated social media have changed our lives in many ways that we are only just beginning to understand.

Regimes have fallen because of the use of social media; careers can be jeopardized due to past and present social events posted on social media; people all over the world are able to collaborate in real time to work and to play. Some people think social media has a detrimental effect on people’s social lives; others believe is a new and exciting way of socializing and developing relationships.

How might social media continue to impact our lives? Who will monitor the truth and accuracy of social media? Will social media lead to increased social isolation or enhanced global collaboration? Is there a need for controls, monitoring, or restrictions on social media? Do the positives outweigh the detrimental effects? Does any government have the right to legislate the use of social media by its citizens?

### **Invasive Species 2010**

Asian long horned beetles in New York, Australian wattles found in Africa, and Canadian geese in Europe. Globalization has led to increased human travel and trade, and as people move around more they bring with them species of plants, animals, and diseases from their home regions, introducing these invasive species into non-native habitats. Such movement of species can harm ecosystems, economies, and human health. Can such harm be effectively mitigated through eradication and quarantine efforts, including mechanical, chemical, and biological controls? How much of a role should governments play in these efforts, or should efforts be left to private businesses and organizations? What role will increase globalization and global climate change play in helping to address these concerns or in making matters worse?

### **Megacities 2013**

Megacities are cities of over 10 million people that have grown rapidly and have a dense population, often 2000 or more people per square mile (772.2 per square km). By 2030, it is estimated that 3 out of 5 humans on the planet will live in cities - many, if not most, in megacities. Urban environments offer a wide variety of amenities: arts and culture, educational institutions, and high-paying jobs. But big cities are often also home to high levels of poverty, unemployment, and crime. Many urban areas contain slums and sprawling shantytowns where the infrastructure is limited or breaking down and where unsanitary conditions and a lack of public services lead to malnutrition, poor health, and limited educational opportunities. Often two smaller cities simply grow together to form a vast urban sprawl. Should this immense growth be a concern? What special methods are required to govern such highly populated places, particularly where the residents hail from a diverse range of ethnic and religious backgrounds? What other problems will challenge the urban citizens?

### **Ocean Soup 2013**

In the North Pacific, a large area known as the 'Garbage Patch' has become 'Ocean Soup' and is so polluted by remnants of plastic that samples show 48 parts plastic for every part of plankton. As the plastics drift further and further into the 'garbage patch,' they break down into smaller and smaller pieces like confetti and cannot be tracked from the air. These floating fragments accumulate the manufactured poisons that are not water-soluble. Plastics have entangled birds and turned up in the bellies of fish.

One paper cited by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) estimated 100,000 marine mammals die of trash-related deaths each year. NOAA has been contacted regarding cleanup of the debris in the "garbage patch" and other areas of the North Pacific; however, cleanup is likely to be difficult. What might happen to the food chain if action is not taken to clean up the Ocean Soup? What is the future of our oceans if plastics continue to contaminate the waters and wildlife?

### **Space Junk 2017**

Since the early days of space flight, a wide variety of discarded materials have been left floating in multiple orbits around the earth. Space junk as defined by NASA is "any man-made object in orbit about the Earth which no longer serves a useful function". Ranging from minute objects, some smaller than 1cm, others include nonfunctional spacecraft, abandoned launch vehicle stages and mission-related debris up to the size of a double decker bus, an estimated 100 million pieces of space debris are hurtling round the Earth at speeds of up to 28,000 kph. Even tiny paint flecks can damage a spacecraft when traveling at these velocities. A number of the space shuttle's windows have been replaced because of damage caused by material that was analysed and shown to be paint flecks. One expert has warned that space junk is one of the greatest environmental problems facing humanity. Large pieces of space junk landing on populated areas could be catastrophic, but it could also jeopardise future generation's hopes of living and working in space. Will this space junk pose a peril for future flights? When the discards fall to earth, what damage might occur on Earth? Who should be responsible for the management of space junk?

### **Treatment of Animals 2016**

Farmers, pet and animal owners, and scientific researchers have many different ways of treating animals in their care. Fewer than 30% of countries have animal welfare laws, and existing laws are not always enforced. Researchers assert that it is important to be able to use animals in research to test drugs and new medical procedures that can help both people and animals. Sometimes endangered animals are kept in captivity at a high cost in order to protect their limited populations. Animal shelters are often filled with feral animals or those that have been abandoned by their owners. Wild animals in many parts of the world come into conflict with human activity.

In the future, how might research impact human understanding and treatment of animals? Are zoos useful educational tools or unethical exhibitions? Are certain animals entitled to more rights than others based on cultural or intelligence differences? How can humans be better stewards in the treatment of animals? Who decides the appropriate treatment of animals and their role in society?

## **Water Quality 2011**

Over the years we have made great strides in maximizing water quality. We have also developed innovative ways to clean up messes that we have made. Filters have been devised and chemicals have been discovered that will neutralize other dangerous chemicals. While these solutions have dealt with industrial and household wastes, a new challenge has come in the back door. We are now finding that Prozac, Ritalin, Adderall, Dexedrine, just to name a few, in our water systems. These and many more drugs pass through our systems and enter the sewer systems. In many places, the water that is "cleaned" is water that is sent back to the drinking water sources. While many other pollutants have been filtered or neutralized, these systems do not filter or neutralize the many legal and illegal drugs that are being consumed today. We are finding these drugs in the systems of humans and animals in the wild that have never had personal access to the drugs. Is finding more new ways to filter or neutralize the water the answer or must we once again find ways to minimize the causes?