

Leading a Council of All Beings

YOU'LL NEED:

- **A quiet place in the woods or in a room where you won't be disturbed. Avoid rooms with florescent lights, or bring a small lamp if you will be doing this activity in a classroom - the mood really does matter in this activity.**
- **Construction paper, paints, crayons, stones, shells, or other found objects**
- **Scissors**
- **Glue**
- **Any other art supplies that you have**

Procedures: This *Council of All Beings* is modified from the book *Thinking Like a Mountain: Toward a Council of All Beings* by Joanna Macy, Arne Naess, John Seed and Pat Fleming. This book describes a council that happens over many days, not during a class period. We highly recommend this book which is available from CCL. (See page 81.)

Explain the entire council before beginning, so that students know what is going to happen.

1. Invite students to sit or lie down so that they are comfortable. Ask them to close their eyes, and let the image of an animal or part of nature come to them. Remind them not to force themselves to think about a certain animal, rather, let the being visit them in their thoughts.
2. Ask the student to become the being that has visited them in their imaginations. Ask that they feel themselves turning into this animal or part of nature (they could be a cloud, a mountain, a tree,

a desert, etc.). 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 other 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?" Remind them to listen inside for the answers.

3. After giving the students some time to really "become" their being, bring the art supplies into the center of the circle, and invite the students to open their eyes and SILENTLY make a mask to represent themselves as this being. The mask does not have to look like the being as long as it feels like it's representative. Some participants will be tempted to spend a long time on their mask. Remind them that the mask is only representative, and give a 5 minute and 1 minute warning for finishing the mask.

4. When everyone is done making their mask, form the circle again. Call people together and ask all the beings who have come to the council to speak.

5. One by one each being should introduce him, her, or itself, and say what their life is like, who they are, and how they spend their time. After each animal speaks, the council should respond by saying "We hear you [name of being]."

6. Ask the beings to each speak again, this time telling the council what is happening to them on this planet now. What people have done to them, and what they would like to say to people. Once again, the rest of the group responds by saying "We hear you [name of being]."

7. After each has spoken again, ask the animals to talk once more, sharing what wisdom, knowledge, or gifts they have to offer, and what they might teach people willing to listen. The group responds by saying "We thank you [name of being]."

8. Finally, after each being has spoken for the last time, ask participants to remove their masks one by one. As each of them takes off their mask, invite them to make a promise to change one aspect of their life which hurts their being.

9. Remind each participant that the promises are very serious, and no promise should be made that can't be kept. A small promise kept is far better than a big promise broken.

10. The council ends when you say something like: "These promises made shall not be broken. Many thanks to the beings who have come together today to share their feelings, dreams, hopes, and wisdom."

11. When the council is over, ask each participant if they would be willing to meet again. Those who wish to meet again should schedule another time for holding a council of all beings. You may find that each council becomes easier and more meaningful.

12. As you leave, know that you are helping animals and the Earth and making the world a better place for all creatures. Remind yourself that you can save the Earth and end suffering.

