

Session 5

Heroes and villains



Game Greed

Split the playing area into two halves (countries) and scatter an equal number of items in each. These might be balls, buckets or beanbags, for example. Split into two teams. Each team's aim is to run into the other country, grab one item, and put it down in their own country. If touched by a member of the opposite team, they have to drop the item and return to the furthest point of their own country. Which team can get all the items?

While climate change is a villain worldwide, Nicaragua is one of the countries most affected by it, especially in the coffee growing industry.

Discussion What do you know already about climate change, its causes and its effects? <https://bbc.in/3gJzcTx> may be helpful. Have you been aware of any changes in the weather in the UK? Have older people you know noticed any changes over the years?

For every ten people in Nicaragua, six make a living from farming and agriculture. Changes in the climate mean that temperatures and weather patterns are changing, the availability of fresh water is decreasing, and health is being affected.

If there's too much rain, coffee beans can suffer from fungal diseases. If there is not enough rain and too much sun, the beans can suffer from diseases like chasparria, which causes half the bean to ripen too soon (they look scorched) while the other half remains underdeveloped.

Rising temperatures result in more hurricanes. There is less rainfall overall, but when it does rain it is heavier, bringing more risk of mudslides and land erosion. This is made worse by deforestation – areas of forest are cut down to make way for crops, decreasing the available shade, making the soil less stable, and meaning that there are fewer trees to absorb the dangerous CO2 and release oxygen into the environment.



Bernardina described the impact of climate change on their lives: 'With climate change, we have less water to wash our coffee and we need lots of water. With the diseases that we've seen in our coffee, that's how nature works when we don't think about the consequence of our behaviour. We as farmers have been doing deforestation and stubble burnings and destroying protected lands in our communities, and now the rains are getting away from us. We have to understand it, as it's our fault. We now regret it.'

Bering explained: 'My father is 82. For his age group, it's been a dramatic change of the weather. Before he used to see that the surrounding area was full of trees. Before, the soil was more fertile because we didn't see this excess of chemical fertilisers. He says how much hotter it is now. Climate change is brought about by humans around the world, and especially in countries like Britain and the US, producing too much carbon dioxide through manufacturing and in vehicle fumes.'

Make a Difference

Try the WWF carbon footprint calculator www.footprint.wwf.org.uk. This will give you an opportunity to think about some of the ways in which people in the UK contribute to climate change. Is there a way in which you can become a climate change hero, by making a change in your own lifestyle to reduce your impact on the environment and/or by campaigning?

Why not try upcycling and repairing some old clothes or organising a clothes swap instead of buying new? Can you do a litter-pick to clear up a local area, and identify materials which can be put in recycling? Can you explore encouraging your church or your school to become an eco-church or eco-school?

Find out more about this at <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/> and <https://www.eco-schools.org.uk/>



Christian Aid and Soppexcca are some of the heroes in combating the effects of climate change. They encourage organic farming, the planting of trees, and diversification to ensure farmers grow a variety of crops more resistant to climate change. Young promoters like 22-year-old Bering Ramos are chosen by Soppexcca to give technical support to farms. She said: 'I talk to farmers about climate change. It's one of the main things that we're talking to farmers about, the right agricultural practices to improve and manage the crops according to the climate. Soppexcca and Christian Aid considered us as part of the cocoa project, so we've been working along and looking forward, we are increasing our incomes for the future and making my family's lives better.'



Soppexcca is also using young people to help tackle another historical villain in Nicaragua – gender inequality. They empower women to develop their own farmland, and run gender workshops to educate whole families. Fatima Ismael, the CEO of Soppexcca who is based in Jinotega, explained: 'The gender issue crosses everything we do. We live in a macho country with historic oppression of women, and it's easy to see in the countryside. Through the gender programme, we aim to enhance women's rights and now, because they manage their own lands, we have had good results. We want to change them from housekeepers to be landowners and farmers, empowered with knowledge and economic resources.'

'When men hear that there's a gender workshop, some like to be involved, but others don't agree as much and don't participate. The older men sometimes aren't as interested. They ask them to be part of the workshop, but they say, "I don't have time". And they ask can you send your wife, son or daughter and they say, "No, it's a waste of time".' **Miriam Rizo, 23, Promoter for Soppexcca**

Discussion Do you think you get treated any differently from others because of your gender? Do people have different expectations of you? Do you have different chances? Do you ever treat someone in a particular way because their gender identity is different to yours? Has gender equality changed in this country? What can you do to make your own contribution to change?

Yolanda Gonzalez, is a woman who has benefited from Soppexcca's work on gender equality. She said: 'They give space for us women, and they empower us. We have men here that think women can't have success, and across the country we can see that thinking. In my case, my husband gives me support in all that I do, we work together, we get along. We work in mutual agreement and I support him, and he supports me. This farm, though, is in my name.'

'I am a Christian. God came here to help us, and the mission of a true Christian is to serve. If someone comes here, I will support them and if you have faith in God, everything is going to be alright. I live along with God.'

Bible link 2 Chronicles 7:14 (NRSV)

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Discussion When the world went into lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were fewer factories working and fewer vehicles on the road and in the air. Levels of pollution dropped, more birdsong was heard, wildlife seemed to thrive and the world seemed to start to heal itself. What 'wicked ways' do you think damage God's world? Will the lifting of restrictions also mean a return to damaging our environment? What have we learned, if anything? What do you think the church should be doing about climate change?

Prayer

Creator God, we are sorry that the things we do can sometimes spoil the beauty of nature and make the land unhealthy. Sometimes our actions stop others from thriving. We can't put everything right, but help us to be heroes and not villains. Give us the courage to speak out, to take action, to change, and to be advocates, doing what we can to make a difference. Amen.

Commitment for Life is the United Reformed Church's global justice programme. It partners with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now, and congregations often pledge to support the work of one region with prayer, learning, advocacy, and action for justice. Find out more about Commitment for Life at <https://bit.ly/3tYZhSm> and <https://bit.ly/3xv5RCk>

Commitment
for **Life**

Make a difference

Perhaps your group could find a way to raise some money to donate to Commitment for Life to promote its work with Christian Aid in Nicaragua. Also remember to pray, to learn, to speak out and to act to combat injustice wherever it occurs.

