



THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMANE EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 260
SURRY, MAINE 04684
207.667.1025
info@HumaneEducation.org
www.HumaneEducation.org

HEAR THE PEOPLE

Grades: All ages

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: 16,255 BBs (or a fraction of that number) and a wide-mouth container to hold them; a big, metal pot

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Science, Math, and Language Arts

This is a great icebreaker for any activity exploring the challenges and impacts surrounding our enormous and growing human population.

Note: In this activity using 16,255 BBs, each BB represents about 1.2 million people.

Pertinent information: Pour the BBs slowly and smoothly, so that participants can get a real sense of how many people the BBs represent. The key is dropping the BBs at the same pace by slowly letting them slide out of your hand into the pot. When doing multiple handfuls, let one handful slowly release the BBs while simultaneously gathering another handful to follow immediately after. Also be sure to time the release of the BBs into the pot, so that population growth through time goes from a ping at the beginning, to an endlessly long din of human BBs at the end.

1. Make the room as dark as possible; ask participants to close their eyes.

2. Say: "In 8000 B.C., at the dawn of agriculture, this sound represents how many humans were on the earth." (Drop 5 BBs into the pot, one at a time.) (About 5 million people)

"This sound represents how many humans were on the earth in 1 A.D." (Drop about 250 BBs – a small handful -- into the pot.) (About 300 million people)

Repeat this routine with the following:

In 1850 – 1,000 BBs (a big handful) (About 1.26 billion people)

In 1950 – 2,000 BBs (two big handfuls) (About 2.5 billion people)

In 2005 – 5,400 BBs (four really big handfuls) (About 6.5 billion people)

“This sound represents how many humans are projected to be on the earth in 2050.”
[In a slow, steady stream, drop 7,600 BBs (about six really big handfuls) into the pot.]
(About 9.1 billion people)

Sources: UN, Population Reference Bureau; U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Estimates of World Population

Activity by Kathy Kandziolka (M.Ed Graduate)