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## SUSTAINER

**Grades:** 8 and up

**Time:** Will vary

**Materials:** Will vary (see below)

**Relevant Subjects:** Social Studies, Science, Language Arts, Media Arts, and with some modifications, Health, Mathematics, and History

Sustainer is an ecological spin on the pop culture television program, *Survivor*. This activity is designed as an ongoing approach to exploring natural systems and how they are affected by humans.

1. Ask participants to imagine that they have become castaways on a remote island that has never before been touched by humans. This is a unique island in that its atmosphere and surrounding waters have also never before been inhabited by humans; this island is a self-contained biosphere.

**Pertinent Information:** The geography and climate, flora and fauna, geologic features and other characteristics of the island may be determined by the teacher or collaboratively by the students. Some accurate historical examples may also be used to help delineate the island's characteristics.

Each castaway determines her/his own identity or may be assigned an identity from a predetermined group of people with various skills and personal values.

2. Share that each week, at the Island Council meeting, a challenge is presented by the leader and/or castaways. Challenges are determined by perceived human needs and their relationship with the island environment, such as nutrition, hydration, hygiene, shelter, human relationships, aesthetics, transportation, and the needs of all other life on the island separate from and in cooperation with human needs.

3. All castaways are asked to follow the Four Rules of Sustainability (see below). Consequences for violation of the Four Rules of Sustainability will be determined at the Island Council by the leader and/or castaways by secret ballot vote.

### Rules (simplified version of The Natural Step's Four Conditions for Sustainability):

A. An unsustainable amount of deep earth matter (minerals, oil, etc.) may not be extracted from the Island or surrounding areas.

B. Human-created combinations of chemicals are not permitted.

C. Human use of natural resources must be of a sustainable and renewable nature.

D. All human behavior must make efficient use of resources and be shared equitably and in consensus with *all island inhabitants* (including nonhuman) to ensure long term sustainability, which is the ultimate challenge.

4. Individuals, teams, or the entire group may decide how they want to approach their challenges each week, keeping in mind that this is to be a cooperative project and not a competition. Challenges may take the form of group discussion, role playing, visual representation (art, music, theater), book reports, research, game playing, field trips, etc.

5. Share that the prize is a physically and emotionally sustainable life for all the island's inhabitants. Everyone is a winner when the ultimate challenge is realized.

6. Have the Sustainer castaways document their project through film, theater, illustration, etc. A documented project may have the advantage of bringing awareness of conservation values to the larger school community and may allow for participants to revisit and/or continue to build upon the process of their project.

**Alternative:** Leaders and participants might also choose to research historical characteristics and the health of land areas before they were inhabited by humans; some inquiry into land areas for which significant restoration has been a recent focus – perhaps some discovery of local attempts to restore natural areas and their relationship to human activity – may also be useful.

### Activity by Heather Schooler (M.Ed. Student)