**Ranking environmental problems**

**Levels:** 3-4  
**NoS achievement aims:** Participating and contributing icon. Participating and contributing   
**Contextual strands:** Living world icon. Living world , Planet Earth and beyond icon. Planet Earth and beyond   
**Topic:** Environmental studies

**Rationale**

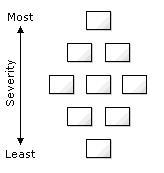
This activity encourages students to explore various aspects of complex issues. It encourages students to consider the interaction of science and diverse community views.

**What you need**

Nine ‘problem’ pictures for ranking – see Environmental problems pdf

**Focus**

* How do you decide what is an environmental problem?
* What sorts of things affect your view of what an environmental problem is?
* Will your judgment of environmental problems be the same as other students’ views? Will they be the same as scientists’ views?
* What questions do you need to ask to determine if something is an environmental problem?
* How do you determine which problems need more urgent attention?



**Ranking problem cards in a diamond pattern**

**Exploration**

1. In groups, give students access to the problem cards.
2. Discuss with them what each card depicts, and have them share their ideas about why this might be a problem.
3. Tell them they will be ranking the cards in order of most to least severe problem. As a group they need to establish their group’s criteria for making these decisions (this may include the context of the problem, that is, local, national or global).
4. Get students to rank the problem cards, according to their criteria, in a diamond pattern.
5. Have them compare their rankings with the other groups, and give reasons for their ranking decisions.
6. For each problem card, get students to brainstorm about what scientists will need to find out in order to address the problem, and begin to seek a solution.

**Reflection**

* Did all groups have the same card in the Most position? Why/why not?
* Which problem do you think scientists would think of as the most severe problem? Why? How might you investigate this? (For example, invite a scientist to talk to the class.)
* What other work do scientists do besides solving environmental problems?
* Do you think we should rely on scientists to take care of our environmental problems?
* How much choice do you think a scientist has in what they decide to investigate?