

**Professor Eric Lichtman**

**English and Communications**

**Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus**

**What Sustains Us? A Look at the Four Elements**

As part of a larger unit, designed for my SPC 2608 Public Speaking class, I would start off by asking them: “What sustains us?” I would then divide the students into groups, and they would begin making a list.

From this list, I would develop ideas for future topics & presentations that students would research.

But before we leave this question, I would ask them again: “What sustains us?” This time, if they haven’t already, I would invite them to focus their attention on the elements of life that sustain us. I suspect now their attention would be drawn to our basic human needs like oxygen, food, sleep, thirst?, etc.

Then I would want them to rank the importance of four elements for their consideration: A) Water; B) Air; C) Earth/Soil; & D) Sun/Fire. Argue for which one is most important and why? This is the warm up!

1. Next, I would decide on their focus for the term: Water, as an example of a resource that sustains us. I would have them research in their groups different aspects of Water. For example, one group I would have them investigate the a) History of water use in South Florida; b) Current trends in water use; c) Predictions of water use in South Florida over the next several decades (say, until 2050). For another group, I would encourage them to investigate global water use, especially problems/conflicts within international countries and some of their concerns. Finally, for another group I would ask them to investigate the symbolic nature of water (including oceans, rivers & lakes)—especially looking into myths, stories, folktales, legends, etc—those drawing upon the sacred aspects of water and its use.
2. After this, I would ask the groups to organize their research among their members, and plan a presentation to share their findings with the class. My ultimate goal would be to help the students develop a Water Ethic for the class, based on their research, and once we’ve agreed upon the main tenets of such an ethic, the next step would be to practice it as a class, and report back in a month on our results.

A larger goal would be—having now started with a Water Ethic, to then invite students, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the term, to consider what it would be like to create an Ethic for Soil, Air, and Sun energy as well.

Some sources that I would suggest to the students at the outset, when dealing with Water, include the following: *National Geographic—Special Issue “Water—Our Thirsty World (April 2010); Parabola (Where Spiritual Traditions Meet)—Water (summer 2009); Blue Revolution—Unmaking America’s Water Crisis (Barnett, 2011); Orion—May/June 2010 & Nov/Dec 2011; The Root “Water Shortage: 6 Things to Know”; “Our Florida. Our Future” (Collins Center for Public Policy); plus “Water, Water everywhere....But Not a Drop To...?” (Speech manuscript, Eric Lichtman, 2010); website—water.org; “The Tragedy of the Commons” (Hardin); “Blue Gold: An Interview with Maude Barlow”—Mother Jones (2005), plus numerous articles—online from magazines and newspapers.*

Ultimately, what sustains us is precious; students very likely may not be completely conscious of our precious and sacred resources, in this case Water. Speech requires Air, Earth, Fire, and ultimately Water.