

In Collaboration with the

Aurora Now Foundation

Future-Makers Learning Guide

***“Can you stand by and do nothing
because you cannot do it all?
If not you, If not me,
who will it be?”***

— *Ellen Stapenhorst, songwriter*

***“We did not inherit the earth from our fathers.
We are borrowing it from our children.”***

— *Anonymous*

“We have to learn to think in a new way”
- *Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell*

Start your own Future-Makers community!

Parents, teachers and any other community member can convene a Future-Makers community. The guiding questions and activities provided by Syntony Quest are designed for youth ages 13-19. Teenagers can organize their own Future-Makers club, too. The Future-Makers process involves five stages of learning and self-empowerment, described below.

Here are some ideas and guiding questions to help you get started. Although the questions naturally lead to dialogue as the primary means for sharing and learning, you can engage in other creative ways of exploring your values and aspirations: collage making, painting, photography, music, poetry, journalism — these are only some examples. The possibilities are as unlimited as your own imagination!

Stage 1: Creating a Future-Makers community



Looking for something fun, challenging — *and meaningful* — to do? We've got a suggestion: create a Future-Makers community (or band, club, group, or crew...!)

A Future-Makers community is a group of young people who come together because they want to make a difference in the world. They want to become modern heroes and heroines for their families and communities. They want to see some change in their world and they will take the challenge of making it happen. So... are you ready to play?

Before you can work and learn together, even if you are already good friends, you need to bond together to form a Future-Makers community. One first thing that you can do is to come up with a name for your community. "The Green Intrepids," or "The Transformidables," or "Future Perfect," or "The Positive Partnership," or whatever! (By the way, none of these names are taken, so if you like 'em, use 'em! Just let us know so that we can keep tabs on who's got what names by emailing us at future-makers@syntonyquest.org). Once you have a new group identity, spend some time together telling stories about yourselves and your interests, listening to music, sharing food... When you feel ready, explore through dialogue and other creative means (painting, taking photographs, doing collages, sketching ideas, etc.) the following questions:

- What does it mean to each of us to be part of this *community*?
- What are the talents and gifts that each of us can offer to this community?
- Why did we accept to be members of this community?
- What are our rights and responsibilities as members of this community?
- What do we want to get out of this experience as a Future-Makers community?
- If we have conflicts, how are we going to resolve them?
- How are we going to have fun in the process?

If possible, try to capture your ideas in notes, drawings, pictures, etc. If you can, please send us a summary, a representation of the key ideas generated at this stage, or just a note with some of your experiences to futuremakers@syntonyquest.org.

Stage 2: Future-Maker awareness



“If we do not change direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed.”
— Chinese Proverb

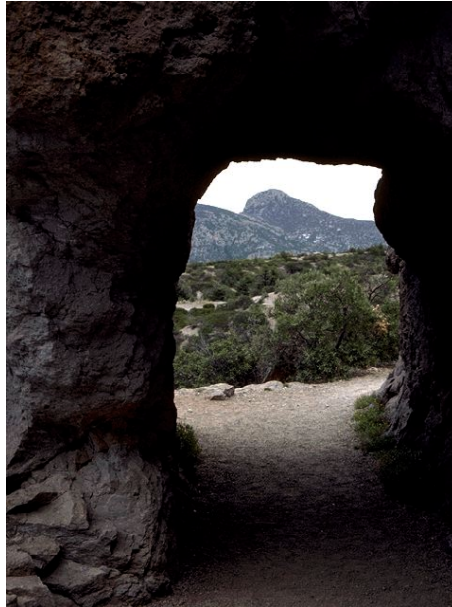
With a sense of belonging together, you can start exploring your context in both time and space. The objective of this stage is to become aware of what in the world is happening in the world. In other words, we all are actors in the dynamics of global change and collectively, as a human family, we face challenges and opportunities that we never encountered before.

For this stage, we recommend you take a look at “the evolutionary story” (go to the EL Center of Syntony Quest (www.syntonyquest.org) and click on the “Evolutionary Consciousness” link in the trunk of the tree) and explore with your Future-Maker friends your ideas and feelings about this idea of thinking about the evolution of life on earth like a year-long movie. So, what is our place in the larger scheme of things? In evolutionary time, are we humans as important as we often think we are? Are we living and acting in ways that will enable this movie to go on? Would you like to know that your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren... will be actors in what comes next in the movie?

Our human time scale is very insignificant compared to the time scale of evolution. And yet, we have the ability – the tremendous power – to change it all. Forever. What we do, moment by moment, is important for what comes next. One way of making a difference is by appreciating the importance of our intentions and actions. Our choices, decisions, plans, values, behaviors and activities have an impact on our personal life, the livelihood of our communities, and the future of our planet. You can start figuring out how you and your Future-Makers community can make a difference by considering questions such as:

- What aspects of my culture and my society do I really like and would I like to preserve for the future?
- What aspects of my culture and of my society would I like to change?
- What is our ideal vision of our world?
- What is our ideal vision of our local community?
- What can we do today to start living aspects of this vision now?

Stage 3: Future-Maker literacy



“Think big picture.... The more you try to grasp, the more possibilities you have”
— Allan Weisman

Now it is time to start learning some seriously interesting stuff – scientific stuff! “Systems thinking” is a way of perceiving patterns, interconnections, and relationships. Individually and collectively, we need to start thinking about ourselves as an important part of the “web of life” – one that is both social and natural – and begin to understand that even our small individual actions can affect the unfolding of a whole society.

Systems thinking 101

Systems thinking is a way of perceiving and acting in the world in terms of processes and patterns, relationships and interconnections. So each time you think of something, like how **you** feel today, you can relate it to the way each part of your body is functioning (healthy, sick, tired, etc.); to the way other members of your family or community feel (if my parents are upset, that affects the way I feel); to the way society is working (if I hear some terrible news on the radio, that brings me down); or to the way the weather is today (if it’s sunny, I feel much better). So how you feel today is the result of the interactions of many dimensions, all playing an important role in your life.

Systems thinking combines analysis and synthesis. When we “analyze” something it means that we take it apart (physically or conceptually). For example, we can learn a lot about a car by looking at each of its parts. Analysis is useful to learn about the *structure* of a system. But to know a lot about all the parts of a car does not mean that we know how it works, unless we look at how the parts function together. Through synthesis, we can understand the *processes* that make a car work. What about if we want to

understand why a car has the driving wheel to the left or to the right? We could take the car apart from now 'til doomsday and we won't find an answer to this question. To answer "why" questions, we need to look for answers outside of the system – in its relationship to its environment. So, the wheel of the car goes on the right or on the left because of the cultural conditions of a particular society.

Systems thinking help us to break away from the falacy of "apparent opposites." Reality is not black or white – there is a rainbow of possibilities. So whenever you think that you have only two options – left or right, up or down, good or bad – try to think of them as extremes of a continuum. Thinking in terms of "both/and" rather than "either/or" is a sign of systems thinking!

A book that you may find interesting and useful for understanding Systems Thinking is:

Sweeney, Linda Booth (2001). *When a Butterfly Sneezes: A Guide for Helping Kids Explore Interconnections in Our World Through Favorite Stories*. Pegasus Communications.

For a more technical and academic presentation of what is systems thinking, you can look at the paper "Dimensions of Systems Thinking" in the Resources section of EL Center of Syntony Quest's website (www.syntonyquest.org).

The big moving picture

To see the world through the lenses systems thinking is fascinating. We realize that everything is connected to everything else and that what we do (or don't) in our lives, affects the lives of others. Everything starts to look unavoidably embedded in relationships with other things and inextricably entangled with the way they change — and that's a *good* thing! You see, systems thinking is like seeing "the big picture" of how everything hangs together. But the cool thing is that this big picture isn't a static one. It's a moving picture, changing and evolving as a result of our thoughts, intentions, and actions. That's what we mean when we talk about an *evolutionary* systems perspective.

But isn't it right that each one of us, individually, is too insignificant to have any effect in the world? Well, no, that's not necessarily true. Complex systems, like human beings and the societies they live in, can experience a total transformation prompted by just a very small change. This is what some scientists working in the area of Chaos Theory have dubbed the "butterfly effect." The typical example is that a butterfly that flaps its wings in Los Angeles can trigger a tropical storm on the other side of the world. And if you think about how one small thing you say or do can (and often does) lead to another, and if the conditions are just so, how it can rapidly spiral into something huge, then you'll see how this butterfly business could really happen. So if we want to have a better world, we've just got to start flapping our wings!

But what does a "better world" mean? If we want to be real Future-Makers, we need to have a vision of where we want to go, what we want to become, and what we want to

create. But my visions and aspirations may be very different yours. We may put more emphasis on different things – like ecological balance, or social justice, or health, or peace. However, as systems thinkers, we need to remember that all these needs are connected with each other. The important thing is to keep our minds and hearts open and alert to making choices — both by ourselves, and with each other — that will bring well-being to individuals, communities, ecosystems and future generations.

The game of 20 questions is a fun way of experiencing how a group can work together arrive at an answer that emerges by itself — out of the dynamic of group interaction — even without anyone knowing “the right answer” to begin with. (See the instructions for the game in EL Center of Syntony Quest’s website (www.syntonyquest.org) by clicking in the “Evolutionary Literacy” link of the trunk of the tree.) “We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails” is a powerful proverb that teaches us Future-Makers the importance of learning to read the patterns of change without thinking that we have to control or direct the change process, itself.

If you decide to play the game, then first experience the standard 20 Questions version in which, after sending someone out of the room, the group decides on a person, place or thing to be guessed. Afterward, try the evolutionary version of the game. Remember, just as there are no guaranties in evolution, the evolutionary version of the game sometimes leads to a dead end. However, no matter how it goes, you can reflect together on the experience:

- How did each participant feel in the standard version vs. the evolutionary one?
- If the game worked, what were the things that made it work?
- If the game didn’t turn out well, what were the factors that blocked its success?
- Did it matter if the individuals had enough knowledge about the thing(s) that were being considered as answers in the evolutionary version?
- Can you think of examples of situations where you have experienced similar dynamics to either or both the standard and evolutionary versions of the game?
- Can you think of real-life situations in which a collaborative dynamic (like in the evolutionary version) could be helpful?

So, up to this stage of developing your evolutionary literacy, we talked about systems thinking as a way of perceiving the world as an interconnected whole. We also talked about evolutionary systems thinking as the big moving picture...

How do you feel now that you are aware of this way of thinking?

Has it changed anything in you?

Can you think of ways in which you can use this way of thinking in your life?

Stage 4: Future-Maker competence



You see things and ask, 'why?'
But I dream of things that never were and ask, 'why not?'
— George Bernard Shaw

What skills do you need in order to live your dreams?

Well, first off, you need to gain clarity of where your greatest passion meets the world's greatest need. Sure, you could dedicate your life to something fun, meaningful and enjoyable and at the same time make a difference in the world! Why not? Just look around ... and start dreaming.

Future-Makers are DESIGNERS of their future and their communities. As designers, they:

Transcend -> Visualize -> Transform

- Transcending means “going beyond.” Future-Makers are able to leap forward responsibly, leaving aside any current problems without creating a mess, to dream their ideals without limitation.
- Visualizing means that they describe what their ideal future community looks like. Through words, pictures, metaphors, and stories, Future-Makers create their own shared “future history.”
- Transforming means that they turn the vision of their ideal community into reality, and start living it.

The process of design (or Evolutionary Systems Design, to be precise) involves the following steps:

1. With your community of Future-Makers, start a creative conversation about what is the ideal vision of _____... your school, neighborhood or any other social system you care about. Take notes, make drawings, do interviews, take pictures. Everything is valid to “transcend and envision” your ideal future community.
 - Use these questions as guidelines to make sure you think of your ideal community in a holistic way:

- How can we promote learning in all that we do in this community?
 - How can we support a socially just and environmentally sustainable economy?
 - How can we take care of our health (both individually and collectively) in a proactive way?
 - How can we bring more beauty to our days?
 - How can we consciously celebrate diversity?
 - How can we all be involved in decisions that matter?
 - How can we protect and nurture nature for future generations?
 - How can we make life more meaningful?
- If you want, use the “six thinking hats” of Edward De Bono for making sure you come up with creative ideas. You can find more about this technique by following this URL:
[<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~caveman/Creative/Techniques/sixhats.htm>]
- To describe the future history of your community to yourself and to others in a clear way, you can:
- Write a story about a “normal” day in the future of your ideal community (like a day in the year 2050)
 - Create testimonials of different actors in the community (that means imagining, let’s say, that you are working in your neighborhood on some day in the future. What would different members of the neighborhood have to say about how the neighborhood is going (from seniors, to children, mothers, workers, etc.)?)
2. Now, try to answer the following questions to bring more definition and focus to your ideal vision:
- Who are the clients (the people who need to be served) by living in your ideal community?
 - Who are the actors (the change agents and stewards) in your ideal community?
 - What are the transformations (the things that need to change radically) that need to take place for your community to become a *real* ideal community?
 - What are the values and beliefs (the new culture) that people in your ideal community need embrace to make it thrive?
 - Who cares about, and is responsible for, the community, and how is this shared among community members?
 - What is the context (geographic, economic, political, cultural) of your community, and what obstacles or limitations does this context create to realizing the potential of your ideal community?
3. Think in terms of verbs: what are the actions (for example: learn, communicate, promote, create, build, convene...) that you need to make happen in order to start moving your community toward your ideal vision?
4. Who can do what? How can you collaborate, coordinate and follow up on your progress?
5. What is the plan to implement the ‘whats’ (actions) by who (people)? [You don’t need to be too specific here. Just a general idea, for starters.]

6. Make sure you revise your plan periodically so that you can modify it and improve it.
7. After you have started implementing your plan, begin a new cycle of the whole process. What is the ideal vision of your community now? You will realize that by exploring this question in practical ways through the implementation of your plan, your ideal image will change and evolve.

Designing is like visualizing a beautiful horizon. As you move toward it on the path of design, you get closer to your vision, but you never get there because the horizon keeps moving, and changing, too. Design is a way of being in the world — and a way of becoming with it. It is a way of living in a purposeful and meaningful way in dynamic harmony (otherwise known as syntony!) with all those things (and people!) that surround and interact with us.

For more resources on how to develop Future-Makers competence, we invite you to explore EL Center (the Evolutionary Learning Center) at www.syntonyquest.org.

Stage 5: Future-Maker praxis



“Be the change they wish to see in the world”
- Mahatma Gandhi

Wow!
Now that you’ve come this far, you have become full-fledged Future-Makers!!!!

To be a Future-Maker is not about just starting a project. It is about becoming an active and responsible global citizen, a co-creator of our world, and a protector of our planet for present and future generations of all beings. That means that no matter what you do, you are always thinking and acting as a Future-Maker, and that's what is meant by Future-Maker praxis — just a fancy word that means “informed practice.” After all, vision without action is just a dream, while action without vision is a nightmare...

The guiding question for the ongoing praxis of a Future-Makers community is:

In what kind of world do we want to live and
how can we help make it happen?

So, what have you learned/created/designed/played with so far?

As Sir Winston Churchill once said:

***“This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end.
But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.”***

Please share your stories, experiences, and ideas so that we can inspire and empower more Future-Makers all over the world! Email us at: futuremakers@syntonyquest.org

If you found this guide useful and would like to help Syntony Quest to continue to create and improve learning resources for Future-Makers, please support us with a tax-deductible donation. Send a check or money order to Syntony Quest, 1761 Vallejo St., San Francisco, CA 94123. Thank you!!!