

Syllabus for “The Future of Life” by Edward O. Wilson  
Online Book Discussion Group  
WVIZ/PBS ideastream®

**Session/Segment 1: Week One**

Approximate Time of Involvement: 3

Biographical Information about E.O. Wilson.

Explore the following website and read the biographical information on E.O. Wilson:

<http://www.eowilson.org/>

Prologue: A Letter to Thoreau

“An Armageddon is approaching at the beginning of the third millennium. But it is not the cosmic war and fiery collapse of mankind foretold in sacred scripture. It is the wreckage of the planet by an exuberantly plentiful and ingenious humanity,” p.xxiii

1. Why does Wilson hold Thoreau in such high regard? How can this help win the race to save the diversity of life?

Chapter One: To the Ends of the Earth

“The truth is that we have only begun to explore life on Earth,” p. 14.

2. What is the effect of reading about the vast number of species on Earth and then reading that this is just the tip of the iceberg?
3. Wilson begins and ends this chapter with the concept of biodiversity. How would you use the information in this chapter to illustrate to your students the concept of biodiversity?

**Session/Segment 2: Week Two**

Approximate Time of Involvement: 3.5

Chapter Two: The Bottleneck

4. What is “The Bottleneck” that Wilson refers to?
5. On page 32, Wilson maintains that, “The encouragement of population control by developing countries comes not a moment too soon”. Wilson mentions that this idea is “taboo” in America? Why do we as Americans feel this way? Do YOU feel that way? What would your students say about this?

Chapter Three: Nature’s Last Stand

“An aging and wiser human population understands very well – too late now – that Earth is a much poorer place that it was back in 2000, and will stay that way forever,” pp. 77.

6. Is Wilson correct in assuming that the people of 2100 will be “aging and wiser” about the damage the human population has done to the Earth and to the future? If so, how is it possible to remain hopeful and to teach students that they can make a difference?

7. What can we as teachers do, presently, to help our students “understand” and become “wiser” about the damage that the human population has done to the Earth? i.e. what activities have we/can be done?

### **Session/Segment 3: Week Three**

Approximate Time of Involvement: 4

Read the following interview with E.O. Wilson conducted by the Earthwatch Institute:

[http://www.earthwatch.org/aboutus/research/voices\\_of\\_science/future\\_life\\_interview\\_e\\_wilson](http://www.earthwatch.org/aboutus/research/voices_of_science/future_life_interview_e_wilson)

8. What are your feelings on his comments concerning the failure of science education?

#### Chapter Four: The Planetary Killer

“Because extreme rescue measures are expensive and time-consuming, they can be used to help only a minute fraction of the thousands of critically endangered species of plants and animals....And not all such attempts using captive populations will succeed,” pp. 84.

9. Zoos spend considerable resources on survival plans for animals such as the Sumatran rhino. Is this a worthwhile undertaking or will it all be for naught in the end? Cite reasons within this chapter to substantiate your answer.
10. Wilson implies that “The Planetary Killer” is us, *Homo sapiens*. Included with this he cites several examples of this? List and describe at least four examples/species that he includes in this chapter. Be sure to include both flora and fauna.

#### Chapter Five: How Much is the Biosphere Worth?

11. Is genetic engineering, and the resulting GMO's, a worthwhile technology to develop and use? State your opinion on this topic. Briefly describe a lesson in which you would a) present the pros and cons of genetic engineering to your students and b) the students would come up with their own thought-provoking opinion.

### **Session/Segment 4: Week Four**

Approximate Time of Involvement: 4.5

#### Chapter Six: For the Love of Life

“A conservation ethic is that which aims to pass on to future generations the best part of the nonhuman world. To know this world is to gain a proprietary attachment to it. To know it well is to love and take responsibility for it,” pp. 131.

12. In the developed world, where the majority of people live in urban and suburban environments, a sense of alienation from wild nature is quite common. Given that this is the case, how difficult is it for people to feel alarmed about the perilous

state of the Earth and its disappearing species, encroaching oceans and melting ice caps?

13. We, as teachers, are affecting the world. How can we influence our students to become inspired conservationists? In other words, how can we affect our students to be more aware of their, and their families: consumer behaviors, environmental habits, environmental awareness. You can describe what you have already done in your class or brainstorm thoughts for future lessons.

“The critical stages in the acquisition of biophilia have been mapped out by psychologist during studies of childhood mental development....Between six and nine, children become interested in wild creatures for the first time.....From nine to twelve their knowledge and interest in the natural world rises sharply, and between thirteen and seventeen they readily acquire moral feeling toward animal welfare and species conservation,” pp.137-8.

- a. Does the school science scope and sequence prepare or counterprepare students to learn biophilic behaviors? What effect does this have on the future of life?

[I had this question here, but it seems like too much for discussion for session 4. But maybe this can be tweaked to become their final project....how would they change the scope/sequence to best prepare for the critical stages in the acquisition of biophilia?]

#### Chapter Seven: The Solution

“The central problem of the new century, I have argued, is how to raise the poor to a decent standard of living worldwide while preserving as much of the rest of life as possible. Both the needy poor and vanishing biological diversity are concentrated in the developing countries,” p. 189.

14. The large NGO's that Wilson refers to are all based in rich countries. To what extent should these organizations be determining conservation strategies for developing countries?
15. Among his specific suggestions for “the solution” to the impending environmental catastrophe, which seem most likely to succeed? Which solutions will be most difficult to implement, and why?

#### **Final Project:**

This paper should be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, and at least 3 pages in length. It may be structured in a way that makes the most sense to your school and situation. It may include bullet points but should be a paper rather than an outline or list. **List here the topic of their final project.** Make it real to your situation – if you are a classroom teacher this should include ways to adapt teaching strategies. If you are an administrator, this should include how to work with your teachers to implement change in the classroom.

20 – The paper is professionally prepared, with appropriate grammar and correct spelling and punctuation, as is expected in a graduate-level course.

20 - It covers appropriate forms of alternative aggression and encompasses the majority of issues that are explored in the book.

20 – It offers real solutions that are able to be implemented in a school setting.

10 – The paper is a minimum of three pages in length, with 12 point Times New Roman font and double-spacing.

Rubric for Course

80 – 100% is S

Below 80% is U

Assignment	Total Point Value	Breakdown of Point Value
<b>Week 1</b> Week One Discussion	20	10 – The discussion question is answered completely, with all elements discussed. 5 – The response to the discussion question reflects critical thinking and a deep grasp of the reading material. 5 – The response to the question is properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.
<b>Week 1</b> Responses to Other Learners' Comments from Week One Discussions	30	10—The learner responds with at least 3-4 sentences to each of 2 other learners' comments. 10—These responses are well-thought-out, and complex in terms of their thought process. 10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.
<b>Week 2</b> Week Two Discussion	20	10 – The discussion question is answered completely, with all elements discussed. 5 – The response to the discussion question reflects critical thinking and a deep grasp of the reading material. 5 – The response to the question is properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.
<b>Week 2</b> Responses to Other Learners' Comments from Week Two Discussion	30	10—The learner responds with at least 3-4 sentences to each of 2 other learners' comments. 10—These responses are well-thought-out, and complex in terms of their thought process. 10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.
<b>Week 3</b> Week Three Discussion	20	10 – The discussion question is answered completely, with all elements discussed. 5 – The response to the discussion question reflects

		<p>critical thinking and a deep grasp of the reading material.</p> <p>5 – The response to the question is properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<b>Week 3</b> Responses to Other Learners' Comments from Week Three Discussion	30	<p>10—The learner responds with at least 3-4 sentences to each of 2 other learners' comments.</p> <p>10—These responses are well-thought-out, and complex in terms of their thought process.</p> <p>10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<b>Week 4</b> Week Four Discussion	20	<p>10 – The discussion question is answered completely, with all elements discussed.</p> <p>5 – The response to the discussion question reflects critical thinking and a deep grasp of the reading material.</p> <p>5 – The response to the question is properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<b>Week 4</b> Responses to Other Learners' Comments from Week Four Discussion	30	<p>10—The learner responds with at least 3-4 sentences to each of 3 other learners' comments.</p> <p>10—These responses are well-thought-out, and complex in terms of their thought process.</p> <p>10—These responses are properly formatted, with correct grammar and spelling, and is clearly at the graduate level in terms of quality of work.</p>
<b>Week 4</b> Final Project	70	<p>This paper should be double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman font, and at least 3 pages in length. It may be structured in a way that makes the most sense to your school and situation. It may include bullet points but should be a paper rather than an outline or list. <b>List here the topic of their final project.</b> Make it real to your situation – if you are a classroom teacher this should include ways to adapt teaching strategies. If you are an administrator, this should include how to work with your teachers to implement change in the classroom.</p> <p>20 – The paper is professionally prepared, with appropriate grammar and correct spelling and punctuation, as is expected in a graduate-level course.</p> <p>20 - It covers appropriate forms of alternative aggression and encompasses the majority of issues that are explored in the book.</p> <p>20 – It offers real solutions that are able to be implemented in a school setting.</p> <p>10 – The paper is a minimum of three pages in length,</p>

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