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QUESTIONS

## with Jim Reding

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**E**nvironmental science and ecology teacher Jim Reding is well-known in the community as an advocate for the environment. For all of his efforts, Reding's former students nominated him for the K-12 Best Educator of the Year by the North American Association for Environmental Education. At the association's national conference in Madison, WI in October, Reding was the recipient of this award. "The K-12 Educator of the Year Award is presented to an individual recognized for their exemplary efforts in promoting environmental education in K-12 classroom settings, as well as engaging community organizations to create a more sustainable future," the NAAEE website said. Reding has been embodying these ideals for years and will continue to do so for many more.

**1. You have won a very prestigious award. What was your initial reaction to winning?**

I didn't know I was being nominated. It was quite a surprise when I got the call. I was very honored by it. The fact that a lot of my peers and students wrote letters to nominate me was more heart-warming than winning the actual award.

**2. What is the most important aspect of teaching environmental science in your opinion?**

I think the most important aspect would be to think about and discuss the different issues and to be able to articulate those issues.

**3. What is your favorite part of teaching the class?**

Just being around the ideas, just being around the passion, just being around the ability to look at things positively is fantastic.

**4. What is the most important idea you want your students to always remember from your class?**

Think differently, use less and diversity means stability. Those are three things that fit well with most issues in life.

**5. Tell us about the Take Action proj-**



ects involved with the environmental class.

Take Action projects started ten to fifteen years ago. The idea was, as students looked at these issues, it wasn't until you actually engaged in them they actually do them. The whole Take Action program empowers students so that they not only understand the change, but they are part of the change.

**6. Any advice for students taking part in the projects?**

Follow your passion. Don't just do them; do the things you care about. Take the time to figure out what you really want to do. The result is much better if it is something you are passionate about.

**7. What do you believe is the importance of real world experience in studying environmental science?**

Essential. We're preparing you for life after college. The more opportunities we can give you to connect with real world situations and network with real professionals in the field is only doing a better job of getting you ready for what comes after college.

**8. How can the average person have a positive effect on the environment?**

Communicate, talk, discuss, vote. Vote in

elections and vote with your dollar. Your generation has the unique opportunity because you represent a portion of the market system. If you want a change, vote for that change, and by that I mean vote with your dollar.

**9. In what ways can you promote environmental activism outside of the classroom?**

Just get involved. Talk in the senior lounge and talk at the dinner table. Share ideas and share opinions. It gets the ball rolling if we're having those conversations. Most of what you learn in high school will not be learned in the classroom. Connect in another way outside of the classroom.

**10. In your opinion, what is the biggest environmental issue facing the human race today?**

The one I'm most concerned about is the lack of biodiversity. It impacts the ecological system that drives everything. Once the biodiversity

falls, it is the mechanism by which everything else runs.

**11. How can students of this generation help with a solution to this issue?**

Little things aren't working anymore. We need to work faster than that. Becoming actively involved, not only in the issues, but also in the politics. What I like kids to do is to find their cove. Pick the one thing that you're passionate about and fix that. If everybody does that then we end up impacting a lot.

**12. If this issue were to be ignored, what would be the consequences?**

With biodiversity we don't even know yet. This could spiral out of control. The very systems we rely on daily such as clean water and air are at risk when biodiversity is lost. We're

messing with systems we don't completely understand yet.

**13. What do you believe is the relationship between positive societal change and environmental science?**

I think it drives it. I'm a firm believer that this is the most important class you'll take in high school. This drives a lot of what you do and the thinking you should have. It's going to set you up for dealing with issues, solutions and problems.

**14. What does a sustainable future look like to you?**

There's going to be sacrifices. We can't expect to live on a finite planet in a constantly growing way. There will have to be limits to what we can do. It's a matter of going to back and looking at

what's important and what's not important. Does having more and more things that make us happier? There's no perfect solution. It's going to take a lot of different solutions coming at it from all different angles. We can't just focus on the quick fix.

**15. What is the role of research in environmental science?**

We're dealing with unprecedented problems. We're coming up with whole new things. If you're not continuing to research, not continuing to learn we don't have the information to solve any of these problems. We don't know what's going to happen with climate change. We can't say we're going to wait till we have all of the information to solve these problems. It will never happen. We need to do something now. We need to move forward with any solutions we have that are most appropriate for this time and reinvent those solutions as new information becomes available.

