

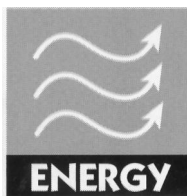
**NEW!!**

## Fundamentals: “How Nature Works”

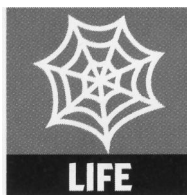
It's a big challenge to provide students with an understanding of how nature works, and how we can live within its limits. Nature is the last area of study that we would like to reduce to a formula, yet unless we find simple ways to break down the basic concepts, we will not be able to integrate and deepen our students' and our own knowledge.



*Maintain the current balance  
in matter cycles*



*Avoid interfering with  
Earth's energy flows*



*Preserve the web of life*

Art Sussman's *Guide to Planet Earth*\* offers a distilled description of how nature works. He focuses on three interconnected interactions within nature: energy flows, life webs and matter cycles. We have put the three together to create a mnemonic that can help us remember it all. Using the first letter of each of these three interactions adds up to E.L.M.—Energy, Life, and Matter.

Ecological literacy is acquired in part through developing an understanding of these interactions and how the impact of human systems on these natural systems affects each of them. The three parts of EcoSchools' section 2, “Reducing Your School’s Impact on the Environment,” directly match each of these interactions:

- 2.1 Energy: Conservation and Efficiency
- 2.2 Life: Vibrant School Grounds
- 2.3 Matter: Waste Minimization

Our mnemonic ELM is a native tree species whose decline to near extinction and then gradual recovery through the work of the Elm Recovery Project provides us with an important reminder of human impact on the environment, and the role we can play in ameliorating damage done.

\* *Dr. Art's Guide to Planet Earth*. San Fransisco: West Ed, 2000.