

# SSSA launches new K-12 educational resources

By Susan Chapman, Director of Member Services

| April 18, 2021



*The SSSA K-12 Outreach Committee has been diligently developing and compiling resources for K-12 teachers/educators since 2005! (Photo taken before the COVID-19 pandemic.)*

---

The SSSA K-12 Outreach Committee has been diligently developing and compiling resources for K-12 teachers/educators since 2005! Resources include two books (*Soil! Get the Inside Scoop* and *Know Soil Know Life*), two content-rich websites, webinars, a curriculum unit, and so much more.

“During my tenure on the K-12 Committee, I have observed that its members are passionate and committed to building resources for teachers, so that they can educate and inspire the next generation of students to protect and manage soils,” says Briana Wyatt, SSSA K-12 Outreach Committee chair. “The committee members really go above and beyond to share their love of soils with K-12 teachers and students, both through the work that they do on the committee and in outreach efforts that they participate in outside of the committee.”

Now, made possible through a contribution agreement with USDA-NRCS, a two-year project has focused on developing materials to enhance the teaching of soils in both formal and informal classrooms to affect positive outcomes regarding soils and the environment.

“SSSA has been thrilled to lead this project,” says SSSA President April Ulery. “I often go to the [‘Soils4Teachers’ webpage](#) to find demonstration ideas to use in my outreach efforts and even in some of my classes. We’re so fortunate to have such great partners

in the NRCS and in K-12 teachers everywhere. Anything we can do to help teachers keep youngsters engaged and learning is a good thing, and soil science provides so many practical and everyday opportunities to learn and grow."

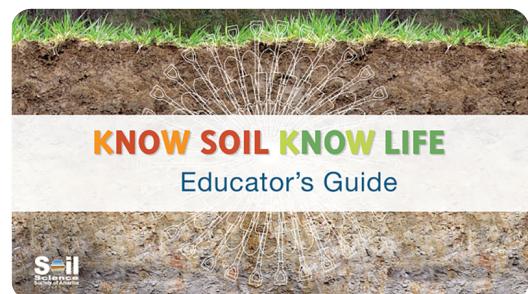
The project objectives were to:

- develop a ***Know Soil Know Life Educator's Guide***
- develop a **"Soil Basics" poster for classrooms**
- develop a **soils-focused educational materials database**
- identify and fill gaps in content

"The cooperation between SSSA and NRCS has resulted in materials that will help educators inspire and train the next generation of soil scientists and society," says David Lindbo, USDA-NRCS. "This will allow for the profession to flourish and ensure society sees soils as a fundamental natural resource. For if we know soils, we know life, and if there was no soil, there would be no life."

Materials were developed with the assistance of a core group of K-12 science teachers through a development session at the National Science Teaching Association annual conference and feedback throughout the process.

### ***Know Soil Know Life Educator's Guide***



*The Know Soil Know Life educator's guide enhances the usability of the book to more easily integrate all*

*information in the  
book/chapters/sections into  
classroom curriculum.*

[www.soils4teachers.org/kskl](http://www.soils4teachers.org/kskl)

This educator's guide enhances the usability of the book to more easily integrate all information in the book/chapters/sections into classroom curriculum. Components for each chapter include:

- Chapter overview
- Suggested teaching sequence and pacing guide
- Classroom PowerPoint
- Links to hands-on activities and readings to support chapter materials
- List of relevant Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) addressed
- Assessments including chapter questions (login access required) and formative and summative assessments
- Links to additional optional resources

The guide does not replace the in-depth information in the book. Rather it enhances it! The lessons can also be used in a stand-alone fashion, and the hands-on labs and activities bring the text to life for students. The lessons can be taught in any order, or educators may select only the most pertinent chapters/activities for their classes.

All of the activities have been correlated to the current NGSS. While not needed to teach the lessons, educators may wish to purchase a desk copy of the book or a class set. Project development of the guide was provided by Educational Consultant Elizabeth Youngman and is hosted through the Science Education Resource Center (SERC), a grant-funded office at Carleton College, founded to improve education in the

earth sciences and beyond.

## Soil Basics Poster

[www.soils4teachers.org/posters](http://www.soils4teachers.org/posters)

One of the goals of the committee has been to translate our Soil Basics info sheet into a poster. This new poster provides a tangible presence in classroom and gives an overview of soil—what it is (and isn't), why it's important, soil horizons, texture, soil triangle, formation, and processes. This unique poster is two-sided with Side A being designed for the middle-school grades while Side B is for the more advanced levels (typically high school).

# DIG IT!

## The Scoop on Soil.

Soil is a complex mix of ingredients: minerals, air, water, and organic matter—decaying remains of once-living things and countless organisms.

**Why is soil important? You need it for...**

- FOOD**: Most of our food comes from plants anchored in and nourished by soil.
- CLOTHES**: Most of the clothes we wear are made with fibers from plants grown in the soil.
- AIR & WATER**: Part of the oxygen we breathe is produced by plants living in the soil. Much of the water we drink and use is filtered by soil.
- BUILDINGS**: Nearly everything we build is built on soil (and often with it).

**And the Earth needs it. Soil is the thin outermost layer of the Earth's crust.**

### Dig Deeper

Soil comes in many colors—from blue-gray to brown to red. Soil has layers called horizons. These horizons may look different and they tell the story of how a soil formed over time. Together the horizons are called a soil profile (photo left).

**Soil Profile:**

- A: Horizon (topsoil)**: Minerals from parent material in the soil are washed down by rain.
- B: Horizon (subsoil)**: Light colored and leached of clay minerals and organic matter.
- C: Horizon (subsoil)**: Rich in minerals that moved down from A & B horizons.
- R: Horizon (bedrock)**: A mess of rock that weathers to form the parent material for some soils.

**Soil is composed of different-sized particles: sand, silt, and clay.**

**Soil texture triangle:**

SAND (%)	SILT + CLAY (%)
100	0
80	20
60	40
40	60
20	80
0	100

**Soil texture triangle labels:**

- 0-20% Sand: Sandy Soil
- 20-40% Sand: Sandy Clay Loam
- 40-60% Sand: Clay Loam
- 60-80% Sand: Silt Loam
- 80-100% Sand: Silt
- 0-20% Clay: Clay
- 20-40% Clay: Clay Loam
- 40-60% Clay: Silt Clay
- 60-80% Clay: Silt
- 80-100% Clay: Clay

**A soil texture triangle helps identify the soil type.**

**How does soil become soil?**

There are many different soils in the world. All soils are different because of where and how they formed. Over time, **5 major factors** play a part in how a soil forms. Together these factors are called **CLORPT**.

## CLORPT | 5 factors of soil formation

**CL**—Temperature and moisture influence the speed of chemical reactions. These reactions help control how fast rocks weather and dead organisms break down into soil.

**O**—Plant roots spread, animals burrow, and bacteria eat. These organisms help break down a soil gets and how much water it holds. Dead organisms at the bottom of a hill than at the top because limestone bedrock, for example, are rich in calcium. Water moves from materials at the bottom of lakes are high in clay.

**R**—The shape of the land and the direction it faces make a difference on how fast soil forms. Slopes speed up the break down of large soil particles.

**P**—Just like you inherited characteristics from your parents, parent materials traits from the materials in which it forms. Soils that form on limestone are more acidic than those that form on sandstone, for example.

**T**—Older soils differ from younger soils because they have had longer to form. In the northern U.S., soils tend to be young because they were covered the surface during the last ice Age. In the southern U.S., there were no glaciers, so the soils have been exposed for a longer time, making them more weathered.

### Soils are always forming and changing

**Additions**: Rain adds water. Dust adds minerals. Animal wastes add organic matter and nutrients. Humans add fertilizers.

**Losses**: Water is soil's greatest enemy. Water is taken up by plants. Soil particles wash away in a storm. Organic matter may decompose into carbon dioxide.

**Translocations** (when things move within the soil): Gravity pulls water down through the soil profile from top to bottom. Evaporating water draws minerals up from the bottom to the top. Organisms carry material every which way.

**Transformations** (when things change into other things): Dead leaves decompose into humus. Minerals move through the soil profile. Rock weathers into soft clay. Oxygen reacts with iron, "rusting" the soil to a reddish color.

**This is just the beginning of the exciting world of soil!**

[soils4teachers.org](http://soils4teachers.org) | [soils4kids.org](http://soils4kids.org)

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1448984. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under Grant No. 2010-65205-20442. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Soil  
Science  
Society of America

*The “Soil Basics” poster provides a tangible presence in classroom and gives an overview of soil.*

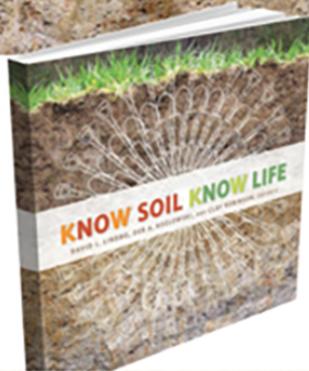
## Educational Materials Database

Since the inception of the committee, we've been vetting and listing teaching resources, including activities, labs, demonstrations, and more on a lengthy webpage. Another goal of the committee has been to create a searchable database of these resources—both those developed by SSSA and external resources. The collaborative grant has given us the resources to develop this database, which can be searched by activity, current NGSS standards, grade level, and more. In addition, teachers can create binders to keep track of resources that fit within their class curriculum.

The database grew from 88 links to more than 250 resources, and submissions for lessons and activities are accepted and reviewed by the committee!

"The database will be a phenomenal asset for any teacher looking to add soil science instructional resources to their curricula," says Missy Holzer, K-12 Committee member and teacher. "The addition of the 'binder' will streamline their planning time since their personally curated resources will all be in one place."

## K-12 Soil Science Teacher Resources

[Ask A Scientist](#)[Glossary](#)[Soil Store](#)[Lessons & Activities](#)[Check Out Our Book](#)

### Know Soil, Know Life

For high school and introductory college students, gain a foundation about the world of soils with our book - *Know Soil, Know Life*. Visit the Society Store to learn more and purchase your copy today

[Shop Now](#)

#### SSSA Members: Volunteers Needed

Interested in volunteering for our Ask a Soil Scientist Program where students and teachers can pose questions through our Discussion Boards? Visit our [sign-up page](#) to register. You may also sign-up for classroom visits in your area.

If you have a Classroom visit scheduled and need ideas, view our [Soils in the Classroom Ideas document](#) (designed for grades 9-12 but easily adapted).

[Sign Up](#)

#### Career Profiles: Lorene Lynn, Consulting Soil Scientist in Alaska

Like most soil scientists, the field work is the most exciting part of the job. I travel all around Alaska and spend 20+ days each summer in the arctic collecting data on revegetation, collecting seed, and analyzing sites for potential subsidence (when the ice in the permafrost melts and the ground sinks).

[Read More](#)[View More Profiles](#)

The primary K-12 outreach site, [www.soils4teachers.org](http://www.soils4teachers.org), is dedicated to providing ready resources for classrooms.

## Additional Activities of the Committee

### Website Resources

[www.soils4teachers.org](http://www.soils4teachers.org)

The primary K-12 outreach site is dedicated to providing ready resources for classrooms. The website has been redesigned with a new streamlined navigation and

modern design. Key components include a section on soil basics, soils by subject, land and people, and lessons/activities. We also have a website for kids at [www.soils4kids.org](http://www.soils4kids.org).

### Ask a Soil Scientist

The “Ask a Soil Scientist” program, active since 2009, is designed for K-12 teachers and students to ask soils-based questions. It has been a popular feature for questions and requests for classroom visits. It’s been updated and teachers and students are now able to receive answers via our Discussion Board system.

When a question is posted to the Discussion Board, enrolled members receive a notification email through the Daily Digest and jump in to answer. Members with three or more years of membership can sign up to participate in the Discussion Board and/or do classroom visits (which are virtual right now).

Interested in answering questions? Log in to your account and select the working group roster(s) for the “Ask a Soil Scientist” program (answering questions and/or classroom visits). Learn more at [www.soils4teachers.org/ask](http://www.soils4teachers.org/ask).



*The “Ask a Soil Scientist” program, active since 2009, is designed for K-12 teachers and students to ask soils-based questions.*

## Other Activities

In addition, SSSA, with ASA, exhibits at the National Science Teaching Association annual conference, contributes to the American Geosciences Institute (AGI) Earth Science Week kit (which reaches 16,000), and recently developed a webinar that was hosted by the National Geoscience Teachers Association.

SSSA sincerely thanks the USDA-NRCS for its support of this project. This material is based upon work supported by USDA-NRCS, under number NR183A750025C010. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the USDA. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

*Know Soil Know Life*, written in 2012, for high school and introductory soils courses, provides a deeper dive into topics including:

- physical properties of soil,
- soil formation,
- biology,
- chemistry,
- classification/survey/interpretations,
- environmental science and soil conservation,
- soils and biomes,
- soils and society, and
- careers in soil science.

The book is available from the Society Store at \$32 for members and \$40 for non-members. Bulk rates are available. Visit <https://web.sciencesocieties.org> to learn more and purchase.

### Citing Literature

Eric C. Brevik, Maja Krzic, Cristine Muggler, Damien Field, Jacqueline Hannam, Yoshi Uchida, Soil science education: A multinational look at current perspectives,

[More careers & education](#)

[Back to issue](#)

[Back to home](#)

---

*Text © . The authors. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. Except where otherwise noted, images are subject to copyright. Any reuse without express permission from the copyright owner is prohibited.*