

ECOSYSTEM CHORUS

Activity 20

AGE LEVEL = 7-10 (5-13)
DURATION = 20-30 min.
LEARNING STATION = Open Area Anywhere
RELATED ACTIVITIES = → Pyramid of Life,
→ Web of Life

WHEN =



UNDERSTANDING: In any ecosystem, key components play vital roles in maintenance and balance.

SPECIAL NOTES: ECOSYSTEM CHORUS is a good lead-in activity for studying an ecosystem in-depth because it introduces key living and nonliving components. Number of participants: minimum 15, maximum 50.

MATERIALS: None

PREPARATION: Practice the activity so you feel confident leading and directing the ecosystem chorus. You might want to review ecosystems in the Leader's Guide.

LESSON:

Warm-up: Gather the children in a large circle. Ask them to define a human chorus. Why does a chorus sound good? What happens if you take away several key singers? Explain that an ecosystem works much like a human chorus. Tell them they will get a chance to sing the Ecosystem Chorus.

Activity: Ask: "Can someone name something that is not alive today, has never been alive and will not be alive in the future?" Have the child who answers first go to the middle of the circle. Ask for another nonliving element and continue to ask until water, air, soil and sunlight have been identified. Have these children stand together. Explain that these nonliving factors are the foundation and pulse of the ecosystem. Have the children begin humming quietly: "Hmmmmmmmmmmm."

Ask the remaining children: "What's green, moves very, very slowly, eats up all the sunlight it can get and makes food?" (plants). Ask for types of plants (producers) until a sizable number of children are chosen. The largest group of living factors should be plants because they produce the food and support the animals. Have the plants form a circle around the nonliving factors, which they depend on for their survival. Explain that plants use the nonliving factors to produce sugars (food) and grow. Quietly have the "plant-children" practice their part in the chorus: "Grow, grow, grow."

Ask the remaining children to describe or name some creature that consumes plants, animals or both (animals). Have these children form a loose circle around the producers. Consumers eat producers and other consumers, and they do it noisily. Have the "animal-children" practice their part loudly in the chorus: "Crunch, munch, crunch, munch." (An option is to first identify plant-eating animals (herbivores) and have them say "Munch, munch, munch." Then identify meat-eating animals (carnivores) and have them say "Crunch, crunch, crunch.")

Ask the children whether plants and animals live forever. "What happens to them, do they just keep piling up and up?" Be creative -- describe a world without decomposers (nature's garbage cleaners and recyclers). Have the remaining children become decomposers by having them name a few (mushrooms, fungi, slime molds, bacteria). Have the decomposers form a circle around all the other ecosystem components and practice their part in the chorus: "Rot, rot, rot."

Have all the children practice their parts in the following order: Nonliving factors (air, water, sunlight, soil/rock) = "Hmmmmmmmmmmmmm." Living factors (producers) = "Grow, grow, grow." Consumers = "Crunch, munch, crunch, munch." Decomposers = "Rot, rot, rot." Keep the chorus going by directing all the parts to get louder and louder, then softer and softer.

Wrap-up: Ask: Did it sound chaotic? Was there any order? Can you see how everything in an ecosystem is connected to everything else? Did anyone feel that their part was more important than another? Can someone name one ecosystem on Earth that does not have nonliving and living factors?

Explain that, like a chorus, an ecosystem may appear to have no order and make little sense. Only after examining nature closely does order emerge. Further explain the same nonliving and living factors can be found in any ecosystem. However, they have unique forms and play different roles in each ecosystem.

OPTIONS AND FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:

1. Introduce a pollutant (i.e., a red handkerchief, styrofoam cup, etc.) to the ecosystem chorus. How does its presence affect the living parts of the ecosystem? What is affected the most? The least? How do we resolve the problems the pollutant causes?
2. See SPECIAL NOTES section above.