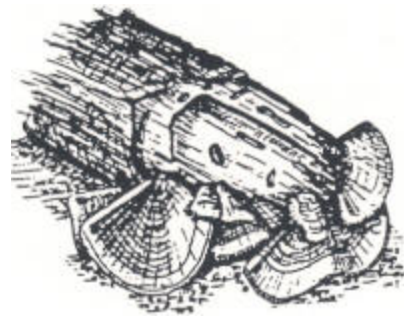


LIFE IN A LOG

Activity 24

AGE LEVEL = 9-12 (8-14)
DURATION = 20-30 min.
LEARNING STATION = Forest
RELATED ACTIVITY = ← Ecosystem
Chorus

WHEN =



UNDERSTANDING: Dead and dying logs support interdependent plant and animal communities that change over time.

MATERIALS:

- Hand lens (optional)
- Notebook, clipboard (see Activity A) and pen (optional)

PREPARATION: Locate three to four fallen rotting logs in different stages of decomposition. Prepare a route through the woods to lead you to each log during the activity. (Temporarily flagging the area of each log may help you relocate them.) You may want to review decomposers in the Leader's Guide.

LESSON:

Warm-up: Discuss what happens to plants and animals when they die. Do they keep on piling up? Where do they go and what changes them? Explain the role of decomposers in recycling organic material back into the food web. Tell the group they'll be going on a short hike to look for decomposers at work.

Activity: At each log, have the children consider the following: (1) Are living things growing on the log (i.e., fungi, mushrooms, algae, mosses, young bushes, saplings)? (2) Is there evidence of animal activity on or around the log (insect holes, woodpecker holes, animal dens, etc.)? (3) Evidence of plants and animals inside the log? (Tear up a portion of the log only as a last resort. Respect animals' homes inside. They are there for a reason.) (4) Look for sawdust around the base of the log as an indication of its breakdown by insects and small mammals. (5) Note the state of decomposition of the log (i.e., bark may be missing, or the log may still be rich in color, which indicates it has recently fallen).

Keep track of the group's observations through oral, written or pictorial descriptions.

Wrap-up: Close the discussion by asking: What were the similarities and differences between each log? Why? How do small mammals, insects, worms and spiders benefit from the fallen logs? (They provide habitats or homes.) How do tree seedlings, wildflowers, mosses and fungi benefit from the fallen logs? (They provide growing sites.) How do the surrounding forest plants benefit from the fallen logs? (Nutrients in the log return to the soil, where they are reabsorbed by the plants.)

OPTIONS AND FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:

Have the children locate a small area in the woods (3 x 10 feet) and have them describe the plant and animal populations found there. Compare plant and animal populations in this area with that of the rotting log.