



Openers and Closers

The following activities are quick, fun, and easy-to-organize activities you can use in your classroom, schoolyard, or local forest area. They are geared towards upper elementary students, but can easily be adapted to lower or higher grades.

Predator and Prey

This activity introduces students to the relationship between predators and prey and the adaptations and behaviors prey have to avoid predation.

- Ask students what it means to be a predator and what it means to be prey.
- Discuss techniques that prey use to escape predators -- running, hiding, camouflaging and staying still.
- Pick one student to be the predator. This student will be blindfolded while the teacher counts to ten and the other students, the prey, run and hide.
- When you have counted to ten all prey should freeze where they are.
- The predator will then call out the names of the people that he/she can see. These students will then come and stand silently by the predator. They will become predators for the next round.
- Once the predator has called in all of the prey that he/she is able to see, round 2 will begin. All of the captured prey will put on blindfolds and the remaining prey will need to move closer to the predators.
- Once a count of ten has been completed, all predators take off their blindfolds and look for prey. At the end of this round all prey that have not been captured have escaped the predators.
- The prey that is closest to the predator at the end can choose to be the next predator if they wish!

Web of Life

Plants and animals are interdependent – they require each other to survive. This activity has students examine how organisms in a local ecosystem affect, and are affected, by each other.

- Make enough nametags for each student in the class. Nametags should include types of plants (i.e. pine tree, wild rose shrub, moss), animals (i.e. grizzly bear, weasel, snowshoe hare, deer mouse), insects (i.e. ant, beetle, spider), and other ecosystem components (i.e. water, rock, rotting log).
- Have students stand in a circle.
- Pick one student to start off holding a ball of yarn. Holding the loose end of the yarn, have the student toss the yarn to another student. The student that they throw the yarn to should have a nametag that represents something that the first student is dependant on for survival or that depends on them for survival.
- Continue with this until all students are joined. This represents the web of life in that ecosystem and shows how living and non-living things are interdependent.
- To represent how changes to the environment can impact an ecosystem, introduce an event.

Examples:

- Mountain pine beetles have infested a forest - this kills off the pine trees. (pine tree drops the yarn)
- Illegal poaching of bears is a problem in this ecosystem and the grizzly bear has been eliminated. (grizzly bear drops the yarn)
- There has been an oil spill that has affected the local lake. (the water drops the yarn)
- Once the first person drops the yarn, anyone who was connected to that person needs to drop his or her yarn. This continues until all students have dropped their yarn. This will illustrate that an ecosystem is very sensitive and changing one aspect of the ecosystem can have widespread effects.



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Meet a Tree

Using their senses of smell, touch and hearing, students will “Meet a Tree” and attempt to identify their tree from other trees in the forested area.

- Working in groups of two, one student will lead their blindfolded partner into a forest and up to a tree.
- That student will have about thirty seconds to get to know their tree. They can feel for distinct characteristics of the tree, texture of the bark, the ground near the tree, the height of the branches, and the proximity of other trees or shrubs nearby. They can also smell their tree, pay attention to obstacles they came across getting to the tree and listen to noises that might help to orient them.
- Once they are sure they know their tree from any other tree in the forest, their partner will lead them away and then remove their blindfold so they can search for their tree.
- Both partners should take a turn being blindfolded. For this activity it is important to lay out guidelines for leading partners blindfolded. *Some helpful hints: walk slowly, link arms, let your partner know what the terrain is like and watch out for overhead branches.*

Scavenger Hunt

Scavenger hunts are great ways to explore an ecosystem. There are a variety of formats that can be used. Teachers can outline very specific things for students to find or leave it with open-ended items to allow for student investigation and discovery. To promote leaving an ecosystem in the same condition it was when students entered it, scavenger hunts should not be set up for students to collect items, but for them write or draw what they find instead.

Some ideas for open-ended topics are:

- Items of a certain smell
- Items of a certain colour
- Items of a certain texture
- Items that interest you

Find your Mate

This activity works well for warming up students on a cool day and getting students into partners or groups.

- Write out cards with the names of animals with distinct sounds. There should be at least 2 cards for every animal (e.g. 2 or more bear cards depending on the size of the groups you want to end up with).
- Distribute one card to every student in your class making sure that there is at least two of each animal handed out. Students are not to share the animal that they are.
- Once every student has an animal identity, blindfold students in an open area. Students will then need to make their animal sound and search for their mate by listening for the similar sound.

Crows and Eagles

This active game is a great review activity for any topic.

- Divide students into two groups – the crows and the eagles.
- Using a playing field, mark a centre line and an area at either end of the field that will be safe zones.
- Have the students line up in two lines facing each other, each line about a foot back from the centre line.



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- Explain to students that crows have a reputation of being mischievous birds while eagles are seen as being noble. You will say a statement that can be either true or false (e.g. bogs are a type of wetland – true, or aspen poplars are coniferous trees – false). If the statements are true, the crows will chase the eagles and if the statement is false, the eagles will chase the crows.
- The students being chased want to make it across their safe line without being tagged. If they do so they remain the same type of bird. If they are tagged, they must join the other team and become the other type of bird.
- There is no definitive end to the game – it can continue as long as there are birds on both teams.

Nature's Symphony

Nature is alive and full of sounds.

- Have your students find places to sit where they are away from other students and distractions.
- Provide each of them with a blank piece of paper with an X in the middle. The X indicates where they are sitting. Have students sit in silence for 3-5 minutes marking down what they are able to hear and where it is in relation to them. They can either draw pictures of the sounds that they hear or use words.
- Discussion can follow where students share what they've heard. You may also put forward some discussion questions such as, "What different sounds do you think you would hear if we came here in a different season?"

Food, Water, Shelter

This activity introduces students to the needs of all animals – food, water and shelter.

- Have students stand across from each other in two lines – one third on one side, two thirds on the other side. These lines should be at least ten meters apart.
- The smaller group will be caribou (you can use any type of animal) and the larger group will represent food, water and shelter. Have the two lines turn their backs to each other. At this time, each 'caribou' will choose which of their needs they need to meet and each member of the 'needs' group will decide which of the needs they are going to represent.
- Each need has an action associated with it that students need to make:
 - Shelter - put hands together in a point over head
 - Water - hold hand in front of mouth as though drinking from a glass
 - Food - a hand is rubbed across the stomach
- At the count of three, everyone turns around. Keeping their sign in place and not changing signs, the caribou run across and partner up with a student that has the matching sign. If they are able to find someone with the same sign as them who hasn't already been claimed by another caribou, they have had a successful season and they return to the caribou line with their partner. If they don't match up, they move over to the needs line.
- This process then repeats with students changing their sign with each round if they'd like, just not during a round.
- The difference in caribou population each season can lead to excellent discussions on conditions that determine whether populations are able to meet their needs and the effect that can have on populations.



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Forest Color Craze

When people think about forested areas the dominant color that tends to come to mind is green. In reality nature contains every color on an artist's palette. Have students spend a few minutes discovering just how colorful the forest really is using the following ideas:

- Provide students with color wheels and have them see how many of the colors they can find in the forest.
- Have students each pick a tree and see how many colors they can find on it. Often, bark has colorful lichen on it and a single leaf can be many different colors as well.
- Have students draw pictures of 5 things that are not brown or green in the forest. Challenge them to find colors that they would not usually expect to find in the forest.

Leaf Litter

This activity allows students to explore through decomposing organic matter to find insects and organisms that live there.

- Equip each student with a spoon for digging, a bucket or cup and magnifying glasses or bug boxes if available.
- Students are then ready to explore leaf litter, topsoil and decomposing logs. Have them collect insects and living organisms carefully in their bucket.
- Have students identify what they were able to find and what role it plays in the ecosystem.
- After they are finished with their insects and organisms, students should return them to where they were found.