

Biodiversity Trust Games

Junior Level Activities (ages 9-12)

Source: Beth Parks and Liz Hood

Basic Description:

These activities are designed to be done outside (where possible), and to be done with some prior knowledge of trust-building and group dynamics. These are best done at the end of your class' time with this unit, and require a strong leadership presence from their teacher. If you want to try these activities, but have not facilitated trust exercises with groups before, check out one or two of these books to get the general idea of how activities ought to be lead:

- **Quicksilver: Adventure Games, Initiative Problems, trust Activities and a Guide to Effective Leadership.** Karl Rohnke and S. Butler. 1995. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company: Dubuque, Iowa. Silver Bullets: A Guide to Initiative Problems, Adventure Games and Trust Activities. Karl Rohnke. 1986. Project Adventure: Hamilton, MA.
- **Teamwork and Teampay.** Jim Cain and B. Jolliff. 1998. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company: Dubuque, Iowa.
- **Tribes: A New Way of Learning and Being Together.** Jeanne Gibbs. 1995. CentreSource Systems: Sausalito, CA.

Materials:

- A 25-30m length of sturdy soft rope (not the hard yellow nylon type if possible)

Time Allotment: 40– 60 minutes. These activities can be broached as a fun group initiative, or as a means to generate more meaningful discussion. Only you can judge which approach will best suit your class. Obviously the more talking, the longer time you will need to complete these activities.

Procedure:

Introduction:

- It is important to set a tone of trust amid the class. If your class isn't often outside, be sure to anticipate the giddiness by have students sit in a seated circle. Explain that they will be involved in a range of activities that will require trusting one another and being trustworthy. Spend a few minutes generating ideas from the class about what being a trustworthy person looks and sounds like, and what a trusting person looks and sounds like.
* The first activity will require students to sit on one another's laps- be sure to be sensitive to cultural or individual concerns around this and place affected students in an appropriate place for their needs- either with their gender, or stepping out for the moment

Activity:

Biodiversity Lap Sit

- Have the class make a tight shoulder-to-shoulder circle. Then ask everyone to turn to his or her right (everyone should be facing in the same direction). Squeeze everyone in a little tighter. Then explain that on the count of three, everyone will slowly sit down. Ask if everyone is ready. Then countdown and... sit.
- Likely the first attempt will be a bit silly- the circle may fall apart. If so, reassemble and try again.
- When successfully seated, ask the class, what if each one of us in the circle represented a plant in an ecosystem? What would happen if one of us was killed because a new mall was being built or if one of us died from too much pollution? The obvious answer of course, is that the whole ecosystem would be affected. Before the group falls on its own account, announce on the count of three, everyone will slowly stand up. Give everyone a ready signal and then count and... stand up.

Biodiversity Trust Web

- Have the class step out of the tight circle and shake themselves out a bit. Keep everyone in the same circle formation
- Bring your coil of rope to the circle and hold one end. Ask for someone to tell you one thing they learned about the importance of native plants. As hands go up, choose students who want to answer in a zigzag pattern across the circle. As each student answers, invite them to take up the slack end of the rope from the last person and walk back to their place in the circle. The rope should stretch from the teacher to the first student to answer, then the second, the third and so on. Mix up your questions as you go:
 - What things are threatening our native plants?
 - Name one weird fact about a native plant
 - Name one animal or insect that relies on native plants
- Continue asking questions until every person in the class has a section of the rope. Take up the end of the rope in your own hands, and begin pulling on that end of the rope, asking the students to help take up the slack of their biodiversity web.
- Once this is done take both ends firmly in hand and announce we are now connected to a web of life- ask what they think would happen if we all leaned back, holding onto the rope? (“we will be held up!”) Ok, let’s try. On the count of three, knees locked, arms straight out, we’ll all lean back holding onto to our web. Count down and.... lean.
- This should go well- if not, go back and try again- reminding the group to keep their knees locked, and arms straight, trusting and being trustworthy.
- When the group is all leaning on the web, ask what would happen if one of us plants were bulldozed to make a bunch of new houses and had to ‘let go’ of the web? Who would be affected? Do not encourage them to try!
- After this brief discussion, ask the group on the count of three to slowly pull themselves back up again to standing. Count to three and... stand.

Follow-up/Discussion

- Have the class sit down in a circle again and ask for ideas on how the group managed to do the activity successfully. Answers should be encouraged to be generic (“we had to all work together”, “we have to communicated well”), avoiding personal criticism (“Jennifer kept messing us up!”)
- Challenge the group to think about how the whole class working together to do these activities successfully is like a natural ecosystem. The main theme to explore is the interconnections that exist in nature, and the fragile nature of some native habitats.
- If there is time, talk about the ways that they as individuals and as a class can help educate other people about our native biodiversity.
- Finally, congratulate them on being both trusting and trustworthy- both of that were necessary for these activities to go well.

Extensions:

- If the class is keen on doing follow-up ideas at home or in the school to educate their parents or other students on native biodiversity, encourage those efforts. Your class could make a small garden at the school with their native seedlings, and/or a bulletin board in the school on the topic.

