

Activity: nature detectives



Summary of activity

This activity involves role-playing scenario where the school grounds are under threat from development. Pupils undertake an investigation in their school grounds to gather evidence to oppose the development.

Learning objectives

1. To investigate habitats and collect evidence.
2. To present evidence clearly

Preparation

- Ask another adult to act as a developer.
- Copy Job Descriptions, evidence sheet and exhibit form (one per pupil).
- Amend letter from Developer (see below).
- Prepare rough outline map of school grounds and copy for sound recordists.

Resources

- Job Descriptions
- Evidence sheet
- Exhibit form
- Letter from Developer
- Magnifiers
- Clipboards and pencils
- Sandwich bags

Introduction

An adult introduces themselves as a 'developer' who wants to buy their school grounds. The developer believes that nothing lives in the school grounds and that it is therefore OK to build a factory on the land. The pupils are given a specified number of hours to prove that animals live in the grounds, after which the developer will return to examine and objections or evidence.

Main Activity

1. Split the class into groups of four.
2. Assign each member of the group a role and Job Description (see below), or allow pupils to allocate roles within the group themselves.
3. Distribute the equipment the pupils need for their investigation. The recorder of information will need an Evidence Sheet (see below), the forensic tracker will need a bag, the photographer/artist will need an Exhibit Form (see below) and the sound recordist will need an outline map of the school grounds.
4. You may wish to supplement this equipment with a dictaphone, digital camera or a video camera.
5. Your pupils are now ready to collect their evidence in their school grounds. You may wish to allocate specific areas to individual groups.

Plenary

Back in the classroom, divide the class according to their job roles. The team of photographers/artists should work together to summarise their findings, as should the sound recordists, and so on. The developer returns and asks for proof of animal life in the school grounds. A representative from each team presents their findings using the evidence their team collected. The developer thanks the class and departs to consider their evidence

The class receive a letter from the developer (see below) stating his/her decision and requesting that the pupils share their findings with other members of the school community.

Health and safety consideration

- Refer to your risk assessment for your school grounds.
- Complete a risk assessment if you leave the school grounds. Consider pupil specific risks.
- Consider activity specific risks as tripping, pupils always being in sight whilst collecting evidence, picking up evidence from school grounds

Follow-up ideas

Produce a display board, mock press release, newsletter, poster or assembly about what lives in the school grounds.

Study animal tracks and signs. Classroom displays of common tracks and signs can look attractive. You could have a go at making plaster of Paris casts of any footprints you find.

Consider habitat loss on a more global scale by looking at the example of the giant panda which is now rare due to economic development.

Explore possible food chains for the animals which live in your grounds.

Play Nature Detective Bingo to look for clues in their school grounds. Pupils are given a bingo card and asked to tick off items as they find them, such as a nut, something nibbled and something soft.

Conduct interviews with other classes to establish what animals they have noticed in their school grounds.

Make a log pile to attract more invertebrates to your grounds.

Draw examples of animals living in the grounds and investigate their adaptations to their habitat.

Encourage yet more wildlife to your grounds by creating a butterfly garden.

Pupils create maps to show where different organisms occur within their school grounds.

Make and then erect bird or bat boxes.

To communicate messages about habitat loss, play 'Musical Trees' with your class. The rules are similar to musical chairs. One third of the class are stationary trees with their arms in the air. The remaining two thirds are creatures that live in or feed on trees. Whilst the music plays, creatures move around among the 'forest'. When the music stops, each creature must hold onto a tree. A woodcutter then starts to cut down trees. The children should be encouraged to notice that more creatures now depend on each tree.



Job descriptions

Sound Recorder

As a sound recorder you need to be a good listener. You must listen to all the sounds around you, especially the quiet ones. It is important that you only record accurate evidence. You should record your evidence on the map provided, using appropriate symbols and a key.

Photographer/artist

As a photographer/artist you need to be observant. You must look for signs of animals homes, signs of animal eating and signs of animal movement such as burrows, nibbled leaves and footprints. It is important that you only record accurate evidence. You must record the evidence as a drawing or a photograph, on the exhibit form provided. Remember to label your pictures.

Forensic tracker

As a forensic tracker you need to be good at observation. You must carefully look for signs of animals, such as feathers, fur, bones, chewed seeds and leaves and poo! It is important that you only record accurate evidence. You should record your evidence by collecting your clues in the bag provided, but leave the poo where it is – ask the photographer/artist to record it instead.

Recorder of Information

As a recorder of information you need to be accurate. You must make sure that only accurate information is recorded by the group. You should also take notes about what the whole group finds using your evidence sheet. Remember to make a note of where the evidence is found. You may also help other members of your group to record evidence.

Exhibit form

EXHIBIT A

EXHIBIT B

EXHIBIT C

EXHIBIT D

Dear Class,

Thank you for the information you provided me with concerning the wildlife in your school grounds.

I was very surprised to learn that your school grounds are so important. We had no idea here at Crayfish Developing that you had so many special animals using your school grounds.

In response to the information you have provided we have decided not to go ahead with the building work in your school grounds. We are currently looking into alternative locations for our factory.

I imagine that you will never want anything to spoil your lovely school grounds, so you had better act now! Tell as many people as possible about the plants and animals which use your school grounds. A sensible place to start might be to tell the rest of the pupils and teachers in your school. I feel sure your family at home would also be interested to hear about this.

Many thanks for the effort you put in to collecting the information you gave me and congratulations on having such lovely school grounds.

Yours sincerely,

Mr C Crabb