

Utah's Ecosystems

Who Fits Here?

Post-visit activity, grades 3-6

This activity is adapted from Project Wild's "Who Fits Here?" lesson plan

Objectives

In this activity, students will understand that, generally, the plants and animals living in each ecosystem have characteristics or adaptations that help them to survive there. They will identify some of the species that live in Utah's different ecosystems and describe some of the adaptations that animals and plants possess to live in these ecosystems.

Materials

- Poster board for eight posters
- Crayons, markers, or pencils
- Pictures of magazine clippings of animals
- Glue sticks
- Index cards or construction paper (enough for 40 adaptation cards)

Background

Each ecosystem has life forms that are adapted to survive using that ecosystem's soils, climate, water, and vegetation resources, etc. Review the basic characteristics of Utah's three ecosystems -- deserts, wetlands, mountain/forests. Refer to the basic characteristics of these ecosystems and The Utah Environments Map in the Utah's Ecosystem pre-visit activity, *It's All Part of the System*.

In this activity, students will research Utah's main ecosystems and the adaptations each ecosystem's life forms need to have to survive, and then

create a game to match the animals and plants with their appropriate ecosystem.

Procedure

1. Divide the class into two equal (ore nearly so) groups. Each group will be making a game for the other group. The object of this game will be to match the animals and plants or trees with the ecosystem in which they live.
2. Now, divide each half of the class into three or four groups and have each group choose one of the Utah ecosystems. You will have three groups if you keep mountain/forests together and four if you decide to separate mountains and forests into separate ecosystems. Each group will research their chosen ecosystem, learning the general climate, typical life forms and the adaptations these life forms have for survival in the ecosystem.
3. Have each group make a poster to illustrate the characteristic terrain, vegetation, water sources of their ecosystem.
4. Now, have each group make five cards -- one for each of five species of plants or animals characteristic of their group's ecosystem. Have them put a picture of the life form on one side but do not put the name of the animal on the card. Instead, list or describe adaptations that animal or plant has to enable it to survive in its ecosystem.

For example, a card for a quaking aspen, which lives above 5,000 feet, might read:

"Has leaves that spin on their stems to help keep it cool; shoots saplings up from its roots to avoid having to spread seeds in a short growing season; can make its own sunscreen for its trunk to protect it from intense sunlight."

5. When the posters and cards are completed, students in each half of the class should make a master list of the ecosystems and animals that their half of the class represents. Then they shuffle their animal and plant cards into one pile and place them next to their posters.

6. The two halves exchange posters and cards and each tries to place the cards on the correct ecosystem.
7. Give them the master lists and have each half see how well they did. Do some animals fit into more than one ecosystem? Why or why not?