Environmental Exchange Box

Preparing an environmental exchange box will give your students a chance to learn more about their own region and the things that are special about it. Then, when they receive an exchange box from another region, they can compare environments, people, and much more.

Levels
Grades K-8

Subjects
Science, Math, Social Studies,
Language Arts, Visual Arts

Concepts
- Biodiversity results from
  the interaction of living and
  nonliving environmental
  components such as air,
  water, climate, and geological
  features. (1.1)
- Forests, as well as other
  ecosystems, contain numerous
  habitats that support diverse
  populations of organisms. (1.2)
- Cultural and societal per-
  spectives influence the atti-
  tudes, beliefs, and biases of
  people toward the use of
  resources and environmental
  protection. (2.10)

Skills
Observing, Formulating
Questions, Representing,
Comparing and Contrasting

Technology Connections
Internet Resources

Materials
Tree identification books and
books about the natural
history of your region; mark-
ers, crayons, drawing paper,
and other art supplies

Time Considerations
Preparation: One hour
Activity: Two 50-minute periods

Related Activities
Habitat Pen Pals, Planet
Diversity, Adopt a Tree, Poet-Tree

Objective
- Students will discover the characteristics of
  local wooded areas, which may include wood-
  lands, urban forests, schoolyard trees, and/or
  Tree Farms, and compare these characteristics
to the forested areas of another region.

Assessment Opportunities
- After receiving the environmental exchange
  box and making comparisons, have the stu-
dents list similarities and differences between
the two regions.
- Have the students write to explain what the
  advantages would be for them to stay in their
  own area or move to the region they have just
  learned about.
- Have the students explain the features of what
  their “ideal community” would be like and why
  other individuals would choose to live in it.

Getting Ready
Before doing this activity, you’ll need
to find another group to exchange
with—and we can help! Just fill
out the form on the next page (or online
at www.plt.org) and send it to PLT. We’ll
match you with another educator. Be sure
to allow at least four weeks
for a match.

Doing the Activity

1. Once you get the name and address of
your “exchange partner,” tell the students
that they are going to exchange “envi-
ronments” with students in another region.
Explain that the students you’re exchang-
ing with will not know much about your
local environment. It’s the responsibility of
your group to prepare items for the box
that will teach your exchange partners
about your region.

Safety! Many states have laws regulat-
ing the types of plant and animal mate-
rials that can cross their borders. Be sure
to check with the state or county depart-
ment of agriculture or a local office of
the agricultural extension service to find
out about restrictions in your exchange
partner’s state before you send any plant
or animal materials.

2. Brainstorm with the students a list of
items to include in the box. Then have
the students divide up the responsibili-
ties of researching, collecting, and
preparing materials for the box. The stu-
dents might want to consider some of
the following items:
- Student written descriptions.
- A collage of pictures of your local
  ecosystem types (forests, marshes,
deserts, beaches, urban environments,
and so on), taken by the students or
  collected from newspapers, books, or
  magazines.
- A book with drawings of local trees,
  other plants, or animals.
- Photographs of your group and your
  school or meeting area.
- A video which also records local animal
  sounds.
- Stories written by the students about
  their favorite things to do or favorite
  places to go.
- Samples of special, non-perishable
  regional foods, such as maple syrup
  from Vermont, almonds from
  California, or pecans from Georgia.
- Descriptions and pictures of regional
  cultural events, such as Arbor Day cele-
briations or Fall Foliage festivals.
- Representative natural objects from
  your area such as tree leaves, nuts, and
  cones; pressed flowers; and rocks (see
  safety note).
Audio recordings of natural sounds in your area or oral reports on various topics prepared by the students.
A field guide, prepared by the students, to neighborhood trees (or other natural things in your area).
A description of local environmental issues and news articles on all sides of the issues.
Email can facilitate spontaneous communication and learning between the two classes.

3. While you’re waiting for the box from the other group to arrive, ask the students what they know or have heard about the region they’re exchanging with. Can they name major cities, geographical landmarks, or other features of the region? What do they think the climate is like there? Record the students’ ideas on the board.

4. When the box arrives from your exchange group, open it with the students and examine its contents. Then have the students compare that region to their own. For example, how do the climates compare? What kinds of animals and plants live in both places? Are there differences in the ways people live?

Use a webcam to facilitate the exchange. This way, students can explain the contents of the box they prepared as their exchange partners discover the items within it.

5. Have the students create a representation of what they liked most about the other forest or what they imagine it would be like to live in the exchange group’s area. For example, students could draw pictures that depict their favorite item from the box or that show a scene in the other region. Or they could write down their impressions of items from the box in creative ways. For example, they could write stories about their imaginary adventures in their partner region.

6. Have all students in your class write a short thank-you note to the exchange group, describing their impression of the box and what they liked best about it. To continue the relationship with the other group, have the group formulate a list of questions they have about items in the box they received or a list of general questions about the partner region. Would they like more information or clarity on certain items? They can send the letters and questions to their partner group and wait for a reply.

Environmental Exchange Box Form

Name

School/Organization

Address

City/State/Zip

Telephone Number (include area code)

Grade Level/Age of Students

Email Address

Preferred state or region with which you would like to exchange (not guaranteed)

Enrichment

The concept of conservation can be discussed using the exchange box your group made. What actions could be taken to conserve the forests and other resources used to make the products that they put in their exchange box?

Contact your local newspaper for coverage of the opening of your exchange box. Students could write a press release (see Activity 60, “Publicize It!”).

Have students present their exchange box to their school community, or elected officials.
Dundy, Melanie Richardson. *Forests For All*. MDCT Publishing. 2005. Bo The Bull Elk and J.D. Beaver, along with many of their humorous critter friends and a couple of loggers, explain that forests, forest management, and forest products greatly enhance the everyday lives of children and their families (even if they live nowhere near a forest). Grades K-5. ISBN: 0967449111.


