

Environmental Exchange Box

Activity 20

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 perspectives influence the attitudes, 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; markers, 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 forested areas, which may include woodlands, 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 students 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 “environments” with students in another region. Explain that the students you’re exchanging 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 regulating the types of plant and animal materials that can cross their borders. Be sure to check with the state or county department 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 responsibilities of researching, collecting, and preparing materials for the box. The students 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 celebrations 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.

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.

Environmental Exchange Box Form

Name _____

School/Organization _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Telephone Number (include area code) _____

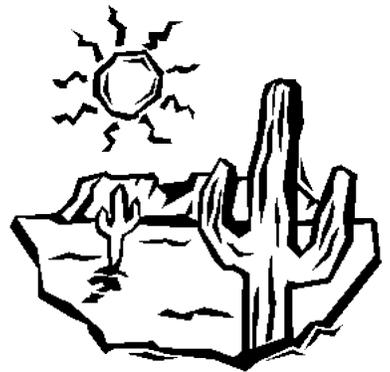
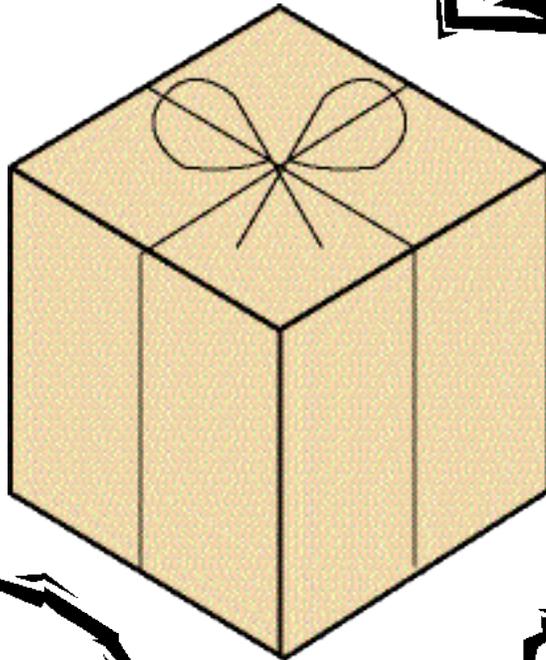
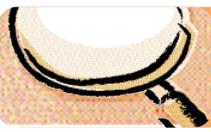
Grade Level/Age of Students _____

Email Address _____

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

Return this form by mail, fax, or email to:
Project Learning Tree
American Forest Foundation
111 19th Street, NW Suite 780
Washington, DC 20036

Fax: 202-463-2461
Email: information@plt.org



READING CONNECTIONS

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.

Johnson, Rebecca L. *A Walk in the Deciduous Forest (Biomes of North America)*. Lerner Classroom. 2001. An interactive, narrative tone invites readers to walk through a deciduous forest. Realistic drawings bring

readers face to face with trees, animals, and plants, creating the sense of a nature hike in progress. Grades 5-8. ISBN: 1575055279.

Leavell, Chuck and Nicholas Cravotta. *The Tree Farmer*. VSP Books. 2005. Children are often surprised to learn how many different products come from trees. In this book, a proud grandfather takes his grandson on a magical journey through his tree farm where they discover the majesty of the forest and the many benefits of trees. Grades K-5. ISBN: 1893622169.

Rocha, Ruth and Otavio Roth. *Blue and Beautiful Planet Earth Our Home*. United Nations Publications. 1990. This book represents a global consensus on our common responsibility for the care and maintenance

of this small planet. Also available in Spanish. Grades K-8. ISBN: 9211004411.

Rylant, Cynthia & Lisa Desimini. *Tulip Sees America*. Scholastic Publishing. 2002. Driving across the country, Tulip sees the wonders of nature in each of many different states, including the skies in Nebraska and wind in Wyoming. Grades PreK-3. ISBN: 0439399785.

Vitosh, Mark A. and Ashley I. Vitosh. *The Forest Where Ashley Lives*. Iowa State University Extension. 2000. This book illustrates the importance of trees in an urban setting, with tree facts and illustrations as told by Ashley as she describes her town and her father's work. Grades K-4. ISBN: 0970052804.

