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Awaken Enthusiasm – A Great Review Game!!!

Owls and Crows

1. Review, Natural History
2. Day / clearing
3. For 6 or more people
4. Ages 5 and up
5. Rope, 2 bandanas

Owls and Crows is an excellent game for reviewing information learned in class. To play, divide the group into two equal teams, the Owls and the Crows. Lay a rope across a clear area, and have the teams line up facing each other, each team about two feet back from the rope. About eleven feet behind each team, place a bandana on the ground to indicate home base.

When the leader makes a statement about nature, if the statement is true, the owls chase the crows; if it’s false, the crows chase the owls. If a player is tagged before he crosses the home base line, he joins the opposite team.

There is a certain amount of happy pandemonium in this game— players forget which way to run or are so confused by the statement that sometimes half the players run one way, and half the other.

To minimize chaos and make things as clear as possible, use blue and red bandanas to mark the two home bases—blue, behind the crows; red, behind the owls. Tell the players that the blue bandana represents “true blue.” When a statement is true, the owls chase the crows (all players run toward the blue bandana). When the statement is false, the crows chase the owls (all players run toward the red bandana). You can also point out natural features to remind players which way to run; for example, forest for true and meadow for false.

Make sure your clues are unambiguous and age appropriate. For example, if you say, “The sun rises in the east,” students may not be sure if you mean that the sun is first seen in the eastern sky (true), or that the sun rises at all—false, because it’s the rotation of the earth that makes it only appear to rise. The best statements are simple and clear: for example, “birds have teeth,” or “insects have six legs and a three-part body.”

Before beginning, it’s helpful to make a few practice statements. Have the players point in the direction they would run instead of actually running. Once everyone can easily point out the direction for true and false statements, then begin!

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Awaken Enthusiasm

Pyramid of Life

1. Food Chains, Biological Magnification
2. Day / clearing
3. For 6 or more people
4. Ages 7 and up
5. Pencils & paper, plant and animal cards

Pyramid of Life demonstrates food chains and other ecological concepts in a lively, experiential way. To prepare, write on cards the names of plants, plant eaters, predators, and one top, or apex, predator; number each card with its trophic level (plants, I; plant-eaters, II; primary predators, III; and top predator, IV).

Because plants and animals form an interconnected community, choose subjects from a local habitat or ecosystem, such as freshwater, grassland, or ocean. For example, for a class of twenty-seven participants, select fifteen plants, seven herbivores, four predators, and one apex predator. (In the accompanying sidebar are twenty-seven fun plant and animal names to use until you can create your own set.)

Give each player a card. Then ask players with a I on their card to come forward, form a line facing the rest of the group, and introduce themselves. You can then ask, Are you all plants? Yes, they reply. Ask the plants to kneel in a line facing you.

Then ask those with II on their cards to come forward and introduce themselves. Are you all plant-eaters? Yes. Please line up (standing) right behind the plants. III: predators? Yes. Please line up behind the plant-eaters.

Now there is only one person left. Ask if anyone has a IV. When that player comes forward and introduces himself, tell him he is the top of the food chain, and have him stand behind the third row.

Explain that each stage of the food chain is called a trophic level. As life ascends the food chain from one trophic level to the next, each level retains only ten percent of the biomass of the previous level. That is, a thousand pounds of plant bio- mass supports a hundred pounds of herbivore, which in turn supports ten pounds of carnivore, which supports one pound of apex predator.

Ask the kneeling plants, “If we built a human pyramid to represent the food chain, could you support all the animals behind you?” NOOOO!!! “Well, we’re not going to build a pyramid today, so you can relax!”

Explain that you will, however, use?the trophic levels to demonstrate how?pesticides concentrate as they move up?the food chain. The toxins in pesticides?remain in the tissue of whatever life is?exposed. When that life form is eaten?by one higher up the food chain, the pesticide also is absorbed. The higher in the food chain, the greater the concentration of pesticide.

Tell the first row, “The plants don’t look very good. I see that insects have been eating you. To help protect you, I’m going to spray you with pesticide. Don’t worry, it won’t hurt! The bandana represents one poi- son part of pesticide.” Then place a bandana on the head of each plant.

Now ask the second row to gather the bandanas from the plants and put them on their own heads as if they had just eaten the plants. Then have the primary predators (third row) take the bandanas from the herbivores and place the bandanas on their heads. Finally, the apex predator gathers all the bandanas and piles them on his head.

Tell the group, “The golden eagle, which consumes a large variety of herbivores and predators, inherits ALL of the pesticide. Golden eagle, could you now keel over and succumb to pesticide poisoning?”

Explain that the scientific name for the increasing concentration of toxic chemicals in the tissues of organisms at higher levels in a food chain is “biological magnification.” Banning DDT and other pesticides has increased the populations of apex predators, such as the peregrine falcon and the brown pelican.

To conclude the activity, you could ask, “Where do most human beings eat on the food chain?”

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Focus Attention

Sound Map

1. Auditory awareness, orienteering
2. Day and night/ natural area
3. For 1 person or more
4. Ages 5 and up

The drumming of a woodpecker—wind streaming through the trees—flutelike calls of a hermit thrush—water cascading down a steep, rocky incline.

Enchanting choruses of natural sounds delight players of Sound Map. Children love this activity and sit surprisingly still while mapping the sounds around them.

To play, give each person a piece of paper with an X marked in the center. Tell the participants that the paper is a sound map and that the X represents where each player is sitting (once he’s chosen his spot). When a player hears a sound, he makes a mark on the paper to represent the sound. The location of the mark should indicate the direction and distance of the sound from the player’s seat. Tell players not to draw a detailed picture for each sound, but to make just a simple mark. For example, a few wavy lines could represent a gust of wind, or a musical note could indicate a singing bird. Making simple marks keeps the focus on listening rather than on drawing.

Encourage the players to close their eyes while listening for sounds. To help them increase their hearing ability, ask them to make “fox” ears by cupping their hands behind the ears. This hand position will create a greater surface area to capture sounds. Then show them how to cup the hands in front of the ears (palms facing backwards) to hear sounds behind them more easily.

To hear a variety of natural sounds, choose an area that encompasses several habitats, such as meadow, stream, and forest. Tell the players they have one minute to find their special “listening place.” Setting a definite time limit prevents restless players from walking around too long and disturbing the rest of the group. For the same reason, tell players to remain in their spots until you signal that the activity is over.

How long should you play? From 4 to 10 minutes is good—depending on the group’s age and interest level, and on how active the animals are. Once you’ve called the group back together ask them to divide into pairs, each to share his sound map with a partner.

After players have shared their maps, you can ask them questions such as these:

* What sounds were the most familiar to you??
* What sound had you never heard before?
* Do you know what made the sound?
* What sound did you like best? Why?

Sitting quietly—listening to the soothing voices of nearby trees, birds, and rustling grasses—calms us and deepens our appreciation for the life around us. Sound Map is an excellent activity for instilling greater awareness of one’s surroundings.

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In Sound Map,children listen to natural sounds and record them on a map. Cupping their hands around the ears gives the children “fox” or “rabbit” ears and helps them hear better.

Focus Attention

Camouflage Trail

1. Visual awareness, Concentration
2. Day / forest, thicket
3. For 1 to 30 people
4. Ages 5 and up
5. Manufactured objects, 75-foot length of rope

This game is played to introduce the concepts of protective coloration and adaptation, as well as to enhance children's observational skills. A benefit of this increased visual awareness is that children become much more careful about littering outdoors.

Look for a trail going through an area where you can see the ground and where there isn't a lot of tall grass or thick shrubs. (A forest where there are both small and large trees, leaf litter, rotting logs, and some plants is ideal.) Choose a 65- to 100-foot section of the trail making sure that it is wide enough for two people to pass. Along the trail you'll place 16 to 24 man-made objects. Some of them should stand out, like brightly colored balloons or fluorescent pink cockroaches. Others should blend with their surroundings, and therefore be more difficult to pick out. Keep the number of objects you've planted secret.

The children walk over the section of trail one at a time, with intervals between them, trying to spot (but not pick up) as many of the objects as they can. When they reach the end of the trail, they whisper in your ear how many they saw. Tell each child the total number of objects, or, if you prefer, the fraction or per cent of the total that they've found. Encourage the children to walk the trail again, looking for any objects they've missed. If you want to make it easier for the players, place a marker (like a red bandanna) near the objects that are the hardest to find.

In setting up, I've found it's helpful to use rope to mark the side of the trail where the objects are hidden. Then place the objects no further than four feet beyond the rope (make sure to tell the players this). You can, however, hide the objects at different heights, and in places where they can be seen only if you turn and look backwards. This helps the children break out of the habit of looking only straight ahead. If you have a large group, be sure to make the trail long enough so that everyone can be on the trail at once. It's also helpful to ask half the group to begin along the middle of the trail, and then come back and finish the first half. This way no one has to wait in line too long.

To challenge older children, and keep them interested, it's important to have some objects that are placed in plain view, but are still difficult to find. One of my favorites is a 3 X 4 inch camping mirror. When its top edge is tilted toward you, the mirror reflects only the forest litter, making it blend in perfectly with its surroundings. (Lay a small branch over the top of the mirror to cover its edge and to hold it upright.) Often I've had as many as fifteen people kneeling and standing right in front of the mirror, gazing intently, but not seeing it, until I've touched the mirror. Objects like rusty chains, nails, rubber bands, and clothes pegs work well, too.

To allow everyone to see where the objects were hidden, go to the beginning of the trail, and start walking along the rope, and have the players (who are standing further back) point out the objects as you go by each one. As you pick up the objects, have a designated player collect them, and another player to count out the number of objects found as you go along.

End the game with a discussion of the ways camouflage coloration helps animals. Then go on a search for small camouflaged animals (insects, spiders, etc.).

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Offer Direct Experience

Silent Sharing Walk

1. Creative writing, observation, empathy
2. Day / anywhere
3. For 1 person or more
4. Ages 10 and up
5. Pencils, paper

*“I’d sit for hours watching the birds or squirrels, or looking?into the faces of flowers. When I discovered a new plant, I sat beside it for a minute or a day, to make its acquaintance and try to hear what it had to tell me.”*

—John Muir: My Life with Nature\*

Most people look but don’t see. This activity helps you discover and remember the physical characteristics and special quality of an animal.

Choose an animal that is easy to observe, such as a bird, frog, or insect. To see your animal well, use binoculars or a magnifying glass if you have them. If you can’t find an animal to observe, choose a tree, flower, or even a rock or river.

As you study your special animal (or plant, etc.), look for characteristics you’ve never noticed before—the color of its eyes, how it moves, or the texture or pattern of its leaves or feathers.

A.) List seven things you’ve discovered about your animal or plant.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

B.) Choose a word that describes how your animal moves (or stands, if it is a plant):

C.) Write a word or phrase that expresses the unique spirit of your animal or plant:

D.) If you were to give your animal or plant a name, what would it be, and why?

E.) Write a simple poem or story about your animal or plant. Tell what you admire about it. Before you start, read John Muir’s account of western junipers. Muir saw everything as alive with its own unique beauty.

Western Juniper

*by John Muir\**

The Sierra juniper is one of the hardiest of all moun- taineers. Growing mostly on ridges and rocks, these brave highlanders live for over twenty centuries on sunshine and snow. Thick and sturdy, junipers eas- ily survive mountain storms. A truly wonderful fel- low, he seems to last about as long as the granite he stands on. Surely he is the most enduring of all tree mountaineers—never seeming to die a natural death. If protected from accidents, he would perhaps be immortal. I wish I could live like these junipers, on sunshine and snow, and stand beside them for a thousand years. How much I should see, and how delightful it would be!

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\* John Muir paraphrased by Joseph Cornell, John Muir: My Life with Nature (Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications, 2000)



Offer Direct Experience

Meet a Tree

1. Forest appreciation, sensory awareness, empathy
2. Day / forest
3. For 2 or more people
4. Ages 4 and up
5. Blindfolds

Trees, said Buddha,have unlimited kindness and benevolence, and uplift the human spirit. Scientific studies show that trees calm us and provide spiritual and creative inspiration.

Meet a Tree connects us with trees in a memorable way. To play, divide the group into pairs and have one of each pair wear a blindfold. The seeing player—if old enough—leads the blindfolded player to a special tree, one that has intriguing characteristics. Upon meeting the tree, the blindfolded player feels the texture of the tree’s bark, sees how big the tree is by putting his arms around it, and explores the tree’s branches and leaves. The guide can silently guide the player’s hands to interesting places on and around the tree.

One Sharing Nature leader in Japan often tells children, “In this forest there is a tree that has been waiting to meet you since before you were born.” The children,touched by these words,are honored and eagerto meet their tree.

After getting to know their trees, the blindfolded players are brought back to thestarting point, where their blindfolds areremoved. They then try to find their tree. Most adults and children (except for thevery young) who have walked blindfoldedthirty yards or more to a tree, can find it later with open eyes.Leaders should, however, adapt the distance to the age, mobility, and the ability of the players to orient themselves in nature.

Faces of both children and adult players immediately glow with elation when they recognize their tree—it is as though two dear friends have reunited.

Children younger than twelve should probably be paired with an adult. Young children may also want to guide their adult friends: if so, the adult can look as needed for safety purposes.

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Share Inspiration

Silent Sharing Walk

1. Rapport with nature, empathy
2. Day sunset / anywhere
3. For 2 or more people
4. Ages 10 and up
5. No supplies

On Silent Sharing?Walks participants stroll serenely through beautiful natural areas. In groups of two or three, they walk slowly and silently, communing with nature’s wonders. The harmony they experience during this exercise opens their hearts to all creation.

One evening at dusk, in a mountain forest in Southern California, twelve teenage boys and I experienced a magical Silent Sharing Walk. We walked slowly down a forest track that overlooked the great Mojave Desert. The electrified silence vibrated with insect and bird song. When a walker saw something captivating, he tapped the shoulder of the nearest boy, and pointed to whatever he had noticed.

We spotted a doe, calmly browsing our way. When we arrived within thirty feet of the deer, she raised her head and serenely gazed at us. Her innocent, trusting manner touched us deeply—we felt completely accepted by this gentle forest native.

Later, three coyotes came trotting toward us. They were as curious as puppies, coming a few feet closer, then stopping and howling as they watched us, tipping their heads from side to side, wondering what were these silent strangers.

During Silent Sharing Walks, animals feel?our state of mind and our peaceful, harmonious intent. In silence, we feel a common bond?with the rest of life and sense the One that flows through all.

Even during short, mid-day Silent Sharing Walks, players can enter, for a time, a magical and loving world.

**Directions:** The ideal number for a Silent Sharing Walk is two or three walkers. If the group is larger, divide into sharing teams of two or three people.

Tell the participants to walk in silence. When one walker sees something captivating, instead of speaking aloud about it, he should gently tap the shoulder of one or more teammates, then point to the object and silently share the enjoyment.

Choose an attractive trail or open area that’s easy to wander through. Since sharing teams move slowly, the distance they travel won’t be great. If there are several sharing teams, agree on a time and place to gather afterwards.

Silent Sharing Walkers?experience a beautiful rapport among themselves and?with nature. Keeping silent?and sharing nonverbally, the walkers become fully?present with nature and?with one another. It is moving to observe the serene, childlike love of the walkers as they gather around newly discovered flora, bird nests, and other natural wonders.

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[**Silent Sharing Walk**](http://www.sharingnature.com/nature-activities/share-inspiration.php)

[**Folding Poem**](http://www.sharingnature.com/nature-activities/folding-poem.php)



Share Inspiration

Folding Poem

1. Fellowship Reflection
2. Day and night / anywhere
3. For 3 or more people
4. Ages 10 and up
5. Pencils, paper

Folding Poem beautifully captures the inspirationfrom shared nature experiences. This activity was created by the North Carolina Outward Bound School.\*

To Play: Divide your group into teams of three or four, and give each team a pencil and paper. Each team will create a poem expressing their experience during, for example, a week in the wilderness or a Tree Imagery visualization, or on seeing a special animal. Below are the directions for creating a Folding Poem:

1.) Person A writes the first line of the poem and passes the paper to B.

2.) Person B responds to A’s line by writing two lines for the poem, then folds the paper so that C sees only the second line written by B.

3.) Person C responds to the line written by B by writing two additional lines. C folds the paper so that A sees only the second line written by C.

4.) Person A writes the last line of the poem based on the second line of poetry written by C.

As the poem is being written, each player has only a partial knowledge of the poem. But the beauty of this activity is that—because of the shared group experience—the poems created have a wonderful continuity and life to them.

When all the teams are finished (about 10 minutes), have each team read their poem.

Lines of Poetry written by team players A, B & C

A. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

----------------fold---------------------

B. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

----------------fold---------------------

B. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

You can write a Folding Poem with any number of players by passing the poem around to everyone so that each one can see only the last line written. Then you can have the person who started the poem also end it, as above.

\* Larry Crenshaw and the North Carolina Outward Bound School, EarthBook (Birmingham, AL: Menasha Ridge Press, 1995).

[**Silent Sharing Walk**](http://www.sharingnature.com/nature-activities/share-inspiration.php)

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