



Junior Ranger Art Bench Trail Activity



Play the Web of Life

This activity can be done at any of the art benches. You will need at least 6 people. Bring a ball of yarn, index cards, and a pencil or pen.

Play the Web of Life game to discover how all the organisms in an ecosystem depend on each other to survive. Here's how:

1. Brainstorm a list of animals, birds, plants, and insects that live in the St. Croix River Valley. Write each of these on an index card so that there are at least two to three cards per player. Be sure to include both large and small animals, and different types of organisms from your list.
2. Sit in a circle. Each player picks a card from a pile in the middle and holds it up so everyone can see the name of the organism on the card.
3. One person starts off the game by holding the loose end of the ball of yarn and tossing it to someone else in the circle.
4. The person who catches the ball tries to explain how the organism on their card interacts with the organism on the first person's card. Anyone in the group can join in to help -- don't be afraid to guess, there are many correct answers!
5. Next, the person who caught the ball holds onto the yarn and tosses it to another player in the circle. This third person explains how the organism on his or her card interacts with the second person's organism, then holds onto the yarn and tosses the ball to a fourth person.
6. The game continues until everyone in the circle has had at least one turn at catching the ball. The yarn is now complex and tangled -- everyone in the group is connected to everyone else.
7. Choose one of the organisms in the game. Have that player tug gently on the yarn. Can anyone predict what would happen if that organism was removed from the web? Which other organisms would be affected? Repeat with a different organism.
8. Now, each player takes turns dropping the string. What effect does this have on the ecosystem?

What's going on here?

The tangled ball of yarn has formed a web, just like the complicated web of life in an ecosystem. The web shows how closely organisms in an ecosystem interact with one another. Anything that happens to part of the web has an effect on the whole system. What did you learn about ecosystems from playing this game?

This activity was adapted from the Web of Life game published by the American Museum of Natural History (www.amnh.org).



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The Junior Ranger Art Bench Trail program is presented by The Phipps Center for the Arts in partnership with the National Park Service.

