

Visual Vocabulary

When many of us were in school, we learned the meanings of words by rote memorization - repeating the word and its definition so it was ingrained in our minds (at least until the test was over). This activity helps youth learn definitions in a fun and memorable way.

Objective

Children become familiar with terms that are important in understanding wildlife and ecological systems.

Method

Kids review vocabulary through pantomime.

Materials

Dictionary (standard or ecological), or access to Internet dictionary, or prepared "glossary" of words and definitions written on pieces of paper a container



An "herbivore" (center) grabs a fruit from a "plant" (left) while a "carnivore" (right) readies an attack, illustrating a food chain.



Two "animals" demonstrate the noun hibernation.

What to do

1. Provide your children with a list of words which relate to wildlife and ecological systems. These words should be easily acted out by one child or a group of children. Some good selections would be:

| | | | |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| nocturnal | diurnal | predator | prey |
| food chain | scavenger | carnivore | herbivore |
| feral | parasite | insectivore | life cycle |
| deciduous | territory | rain shadow | migratory |
| arboreal | biennial | wild | domesticated |
| primary producer | omnivore | lichen | exotic |
| brood | aquatic | understory | pollution |
| shelter | habitat | extinction | hibernation |

Option 1: You provide the children with definitions for the words.

Option 2: You have the children look up the words in a dictionary or online.

2. List all the words on small pieces of paper and put them in a container.
3. Each child, or preferably a group of 2-3 children, draws a word out of the container, looks up the definition and decides how to act out the word. Give them time to get their "act" together. You can decide whether or not they can make any sounds.
4. Children take turns acting out their word. With the list of words in front of them, have the other children guess the word that is being mimed. If you are doing this activity as a review, you may not want to provide them the word list. Repeat the process until all the words have been acted out.

This activity was used with permission from ProjectWILD 2001 Council for Environmental Education.

Nature Note – Woodchuck Weather

The woodchuck, commonly called the groundhog, rises to the top of popularity polls at this time every year. Captive groundhogs, such as French Creek Freddie, are aroused from hibernation and brought out into the light to satisfy human curiosity as to the length of the winter.

The woodchuck is kin to the yellow-bellied marmot and the hoary marmot, which live in the western United States and Canada. The woodchuck's range extends from the northeastern and Midwestern states across southern Canada into eastern Alaska.

Woodchucks usually inhabit meadows and old fields where they forage for grasses, clover and succulent plants. They can swim and climb trees, but rarely venture far from their dens.

Farmers and gardeners take a dim view of the woodchuck's eating habits because of its fondness for vegetables. Woodchuck burrows also create a hazard for livestock. The burrows can be up to 30 feet long and five feet deep, and consist of one or more tunnels, along with a nesting chamber.

Woodchucks are not without benefit to the environment. Their excrement, left in a special underground chamber, fertilizes the soil. In addition, their digging aerates the soil, lets moisture and organic matter in, and brings up subsoil to become new topsoil.



The woodchuck is sometimes called a whistlepig because it gives a loud whistle when alarmed. Other noises in the woodchuck's repertoire include teeth chattering when angry, hisses, growls and squeals.

Kenny Hall holds French Creek Freddie, weather prognosticator at the West Virginia State Wildlife Center.

DNR photo

In West Virginia, woodchucks begin hibernation around late October. During hibernation, body temperature falls to just above freezing, heart rate slows to four beats a minute, and breathing slows to one breath every six minutes.

Upon awakening in spring, the male seeks a mate and stays only briefly with the female. Four to five blind and hairless young are born in April. The young leave home after two months.