



SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Ecology & Conservation 4-8 Classroom Activities

Sea Turtle Summit

OBJECTIVE

Given a hypothetical environmental situation, the student will be able to research available literature for factual information and logically argue a point of view. The students will demonstrate a real-life decision-making process and evaluate its outcome.

ACTION

1. Divide your class into three groups. Each group will represent a different faction in an environmental issue. The issue at hand is a diminishing population of sea turtles.
 - Group One is the local native community.
 - Group Two is a team of population biologists who have been studying sea turtles.
 - Group Three is an alliance of environmental activists.
2. Copy and distribute the player cards to the students. Familiarize yourself with the scenario by reading all three player cards. Give the students a chance to familiarize themselves with the situation and to gather additional resources from the library, newspapers and journals, special interest organizations, Internet, etc.
3. Stage a “Sea Turtle Summit,” with all three groups meeting to discuss the issue. Mediate between the groups. At the end of the meeting, vote on a plan that will be acceptable to all factions.
4. After the activity is over, discuss how conservation issues are complex problems of society that affect people as well as animals. Ask the following questions to prompt students to discuss the decision-making process.
 - Were all three groups satisfied with the outcome of the meeting and the new policy?
 - Is it always easy or possible to come up with a solution acceptable to all concerned?
 - Would it ever be beneficial to compromise your point of view? When and why?
 - What role does science play in policy-making?
 - What role does public education play in awareness and action?

Sea Turtle Summit Playing Cards

LOCAL NATIVE COMMUNITY

You live in a small coastal village. Ever since the first settlers, you have hunted sea turtles. You hunt the turtles to survive: they provide food for your family, and you sell parts of the turtles to traders so you can buy other materials you need.

Your beaches are the only known nesting ground for these sea turtles. It is easy to hunt turtles offshore and collect their eggs from the beach. Unfortunately, the sea turtles you hunt are becoming harder and harder to find. You have heard that they are now an endangered species.

Unemployment in your area is very high. There is no other business or industry in your community. The only trade you have ever known is hunting sea turtles and collecting their eggs. Hunting sea turtles is the only way of life you know. It is part of your culture. You believe that the turtles are spirits, and you celebrate them in legends, stories, and special ceremonies. You feel that the turtles and their eggs belong to you and your community and your culture. Any interference would disrupt your way of life and would destroy your culture and belief system.

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POPULATION BIOLOGISTS

You have been assigned to find new ways to increase the sea turtle population. According to your data, within a few years the number of sea turtles will be so low that there will be no chance for successful reproduction. You fear that this species is on its way to extinction unless something is done now.

You know that a certain beach community is totally dependent on the sea turtle for its welfare. The sea turtle is economically important; it provides food and income for other necessities. The turtle also is culturally important to these people.

Your team has come up with only one proposal to increase the sea turtle population. Your plan is to collect the eggs from the beach, incubate and hatch them, then release them back into the ocean as yearlings. Meanwhile, hunting the turtles and collecting the eggs would be strictly regulated.

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ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

Your organization is a group of "take action" individuals dedicated to protecting wildlife and the environment. You compile and distribute data, identify conservation needs, design conservation actions, analyze the effectiveness of conservation actions, implement systems of observation and inspection, and lobby decision-makers.

You and your organization are concerned about the sea turtle population. If people of the beach community continue to hunt turtles and eggs, the sea turtle population will suffer.

Your goal is to stop the beach community from hunting the turtles and to stop any human disturbances or interaction with the turtles.

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