

Eco Jenga

Goals: Students will understand that all things in an ecosystem are connected and that ecosystems are fragile. Students will also learn the meaning of terms like endangered, extinct and keystone species.

Time: 10 – 30 minutes

Materials: Commercially available game “JENGA”

Procedure: Set up game of Jenga on table in front of classroom. Pick a random component of the ecosystem (producer, consumer, decomposer, non-living) and remove it from the stack. Ask the students which of the three remaining components would be affected the most by the loss of your selection. For example, if a producer were removed consumers would be affected, if consumers were removed decomposers would be affected and so on. The student who answered would come up and take out a piece. This piece while not marked in anyway represents what they said would be hurt. The next student would come up and take out a piece representing what would be hurt by removing the previous piece. The game would continue until the whole tower (ecosystem) collapses. As pieces are removed you can discuss how those pieces are now extinct. If a student attempts to take a piece out but moves to another that piece is now endangered. If the whole tower is being held up by a single piece you can talk about keystone species.

Variations & Extensions: There are several extensions for this game. You could have the students try and guess how many pieces can be removed before it topples. You could also have the students stack the pieces they extract on top of the tower. These blocks on top would now represent humans. The more humans, the bigger need for resources, the bigger need for resources the greater the stress on the ecosystem.

Background Information: You should know how to play “Jenga”.

Other Considerations:

1. Works well as a conclusion.
2. Kids can be caught up in just playing the game. Going at a slow pace helps control the excitement.