

## *HABITAT PRESERVATION PROJECT*

### **Source:**

- Journey to the Heart of Nature, Joseph Cornell

### **Basic Description:**

Demonstrates what happens when nature takes back land after humans have managed it.

### **Materials:**

- string
- stakes
- small sledge hammer
- permanent marker
- a piece of plywood
- native plants
- observation chart
- camera

### **Time Allotment:**

- 20-30 minutes of a class period in early spring.
- 10 minutes of a class period once every two weeks toward the end of the school year.

### **Procedure:**

#### **Introduction:**

Human traffic can harm delicate areas such as small wetlands, meadows filled with wildflowers, and groves of old trees. You can help protect these fragile areas, encouraging succession and productivity by laying out a trail that lets people enjoy the site from a safe distance. You may also need to block off older trails that lead into the area.

#### **Activity:**

1. Find a suitable area of the schoolyard, and ask for permission to use the site. Then mark off the site with a boundary. The areas should be at least 400 square feet (20' wide by 20' long). You can use a smaller site if you have to.
2. Build a simple "fence" with string and stakes. Make a sign that explains what you're doing. For example: "This area is being reclaimed for nature study," or a conservation area named after you class or school. Your plot may begin to look wild and neglected, and the sign will prevent people from "improving" it by mowing the weeds.
3. Post the observation chart in the classroom to keep track of nature's progress in the chosen site. Begin with having each student make observations of the site the day it is made, and take a picture. These include average height measurement and a plant tally.
4. Before long, wild plants will begin to take back the area. To help nature along, try growing some native plant species.
5. As time passes, nature will create a wild garden at your site, complete with insects, birds, and small animals.

6. Continue the observation routine, by filling the chart biweekly for measurement and plant tally. You can have groups of two or three delegated students each time, until every student has a turn, instead of having the entire class observe the site at once.

**Follow-up/Discussion:**

Graph the results and label the graph with the developed photographs illustrating the change over time. Discuss the predictions for the following year. Does the amount of space given over to naturalization effect the speed or direction of succession? How would our local community change if this experiment was replicated in everyone's backyard and in the local parks? How would it be possible to multiply this project in more areas of the schoolyard, and what might the consequences of this be?

**Extension:**

Have each student try the same project in one other place, and measure the total area consequently set free to grow to climax community.



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