

WHO AM I? The web of life ... with a twist!

Source: Various, including - Cornell, Joseph. (1998). Sharing Nature with Children. Nevada City, CA: Dawn Publications.

Basic Description:

Each player is assigned a secret species identity, which they must identify with the help of the other players. Once all identities have been deciphered, players form a circle and, by passing a ball of yarn from “species to species”, they form the web of life, thus demonstrating the importance of biodiversity and the balance of nature.

Materials:

- Species cards: laminated photographs &/or drawings of living organisms
- Clothes pins
- A ball of yarn or string

Time Allotment:

20 minutes + (depending on number of participants and discussion).

Procedure:

- Attach a “species card” (i.e. photo and/or description of a species or habitat) on each person’s back, using a clothes pin.
- Do not tell the participants who or what they are.

Activity:

- By asking questions of others players, each person tries to discover their identity.
- Once everyone knows “who they are”, flip the cards to the front and have all players sit or stand in a circle.
- The leader, usually wearing a sun card, will join the circle, holding a ball of yarn.
- The leader tosses the ball of twine to someone else in the circle, while holding onto the end of the yarn.
- The person who catches the ball tries to explain how the organism on his or her species card interacts with the sun. (Anyone can help out).
- Next, the person who caught the ball holds onto the string and tosses the ball to a third person.
- The third person explains how the organism on his or her card interacts with the second person’s organism. If the player gets stuck, anyone in the game can make a guess.
- The game continues until everyone has had a turn at catching the twine.
- The twine is now complex and tangled—everyone in the group is connected to everyone else.

Follow-up / Discussion:

- The tangled ball of twine 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.
- Players can discuss how their organisms are connected to others that came up earlier in the game.

- Choose one of the organisms in the game. Can anyone predict what would happen if it was removed from the web? Which other organisms would be affected?
- What would happen if you cut the twine with scissors or someone dropped the twine? What effect would this have on the ecosystem?

Extensions (The Twist!):

You can make the “Who Am I” game into a “Whodunit” or mystery type of game. Present the participants with a series of “clues” about the species, with each clue revealing some information about the organisms’ relationship with other organisms, (including people), habitats, etc. The first few clues should be vague, so it is not too easy to pinpoint the species identity immediately. As the game progresses, the clues should be more specific, so it will be easier to narrow down the species identity. Players are often surprised by the range of interactions between species. It is also fun to provide interesting and little-known clues for species often considered common and uninteresting.

