

Lesson 1: The Story of a Forest

Theme

Forests go through stages of growth and each one is valuable for its unique properties.

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will learn about forest succession and the importance of each stage of growth. Students will understand that forests age, mature and reset themselves naturally which creates diverse habitat types. Students will be aware of how the RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife helps protect Rhode Island's natural resources.

Corresponding Activities for this Lesson

- Story of a Forest

Materials

- Rhode Island's Forest Story PowerPoint
- Laminated "Story of a Forest" cards
- Puppets for "Story of a Forest" activity
- Bobcat pelt and skull
- Fisher pelt
- Laminated black racer skin shed
- White-tailed deer antler
- Laminated leaves
- Acorns/nuts, pitch pine cones

Lesson

1. **Explain to students that today we will be learning about how forests have changed over time in Rhode Island and how biologists at the RIDEM Division of Fish and Wildlife are protecting them today.**
 - Ask students to define a habitat. What do all animals need to survive? (An animal's home, made up of food, water, shelter and space)
 - Ask students what they picture when they think of a forest. What does the habitat look like? Are the trees big or small? What does the forest sound like?
 - After students have shared their thoughts, explain that forests can look very different depending on the type of forest and age. Some are open with tall trees and some are so thick you can barely walk through!



2. **Walk through Rhode Island's Forest Story slides, explaining that back in time, Rhode Island looked very different than it does today.**
 - Ask students if anyone has ever seen a stone wall in the woods? There is an interesting story about how that wall got there!
 - Before settlers arrived there were vast forests that would maintain themselves naturally through fires and floods.
 - Indigenous people would maintain small areas for agriculture or to harvest food.
 - The settlers thought that the forests were endless so they began to cut them down to build fields for crops and livestock. They built houses for themselves and hunted the animals for food and fur.
 - As more settlers arrived, more forest was cut down, until 50-80% of the forest was cleared (1830-1880). Stone walls marked the lines between properties.
 - Around the 1850's, many fields were abandoned as people moved to new areas and found new jobs. The fields began to quickly grow into young white pine forests, which was then harvested for lumber
 - With the pines removed, space was created for cherries, oaks and other hardwood trees to grow. Pass around the laminated leaves. Does anyone recognize any of the leaf shapes and names?
 - Explain that today, our forests have grown up into old forests with tall trees, because we stop the fires and floods that once would naturally reset them. Old stone walls deep in the forest remind us of the amazing recovery forests have made. Biologists must now help manage the forests, so that it is good habitat for all of Rhode Island's wildlife!
3. **Explain to students that each stage of forest is important because it provides different kinds of food and shelter that are used by different kinds of animals.**
 - Pass around various nuts and acorns, explaining that trees provide food for wildlife. Can anyone imagine eating these nuts for a snack? Indigenous peoples of the Eastern United States traditionally ate various nuts from the forest in different recipes! Forests not only provide nuts as food, but fruits too, such as blackberries, blueberries, and huckleberries. Forests can provide food for both wildlife and humans!
4. **Go through "Story of a Forest" activity, and show the natural artifacts associated with the animals in the story.**
5. **Walk through the slides about creating, protecting, and restoring young forest and pitch pine habitats in Rhode Island. Pass around pitch pine cones for students to observe.**