

Forest Succession Dance

Prep

This activity could be used at any time during the mini unit on forests. It could be used as a pre-lesson activity to introduce students to the concept of forest succession, during the lesson to illustrate the concept, or as a post-lesson activity to review. Get creative by adding music or nature sounds in the background! Before starting the activity, remind students that habitats change over time if left undisturbed.

How to

- For each stage of forest succession, have students “dance” or act like the dominant plant type of that stage. You can also designate a few students to act out the different types of animals that would live in each habitat. Project or pass around pictures of the animals for inspiration.
- **Bare soil:** Lie down flat on the ground (*Ants*)
- **Small herbaceous plants / native grasses:** Squat or kneel and wiggle your fingers above your head like grass blowing in the breeze (*Garter snake, monarch butterfly, box turtle, meadow vole, red-tailed hawk, dragonfly, bluebird, fox, bumblebee, American woodcock, deer, wild turkey*)
- **Shrubs:** Squat or kneel and spread your arms out to the side, clustering together and letting your arms intertwine (*American woodcock, towhee, yellow warbler, New England cottontail, bobcat, deer, black bear*)
- **Young forest:** Stand up in the same spot, still close together and letting your arms intertwine. Some students may remain shrubs. (*Deer, black racer, skunk, black and white warbler, ruffed grouse, whip-poor-will, black-billed cuckoo, New England cottontail*)
- **Mature deciduous forest:** Spread your arms out to the side and take 3 steps backwards so that there is space between you and your neighboring tree. Some students may remain young trees or shrubs. (*Deer, wild turkey, wood thrush, raccoon, great horned owl, black bear*)
- **Climax coniferous forest:** Spread your arms out to the side and take 5 steps backwards so that there is a lot of space between you and your neighboring tree. All students become mature trees. (*Pileated woodpecker, black-capped chickadee, squirrel, fisher*)
- Wrap up the activity by asking students to review the stages of forest succession they just acted out. Did they expect that a meadow habitat to turn into a forest? What might have happened to the meadow if someone came to mow it every year? What might happen to a young forest if a wildfire happened? If a mature forest was protected forever, would the habitat change?