

Burning Issues

(Adapted from "Dilemmas in Fire Management", from *The Role of Fire in Alaska*)

Learning Outcomes

Students will realize how fire can be used as a tool, and better understand the factors that need to be considered when planning a prescribed burn.

Summary

In this activity the students will make decisions around fire management issues. They will then work in small groups to get more information around the issues and make a more informed decision.

Activity Information

Grade level: intermediate

Subject: english, geography, science

Focus on Forests connections (I/S Manual):

Awareness/Forest Community: Forest Field Trip, pg. 9; A Roost with a View, pg. 14; Invent a Forest Creature, pg. 18; Biosphere, pg. 21; How Forests Affect the Environment, pg. 77; Change in Forest Ecosystems, pg. 83; Field Trip to a Forest, pg. 88; **Classification:** Trees at Home, pg. 70; **Change:** Life History of a Tree, pg. 105; **Prevention/Management:** Forest Fire Forecast, pg. 45; Urban Wilderness at School, pg. 57; Fighting Fire, pg. 116; Forest Management Activities, pg. 130; Forest Values, pg. 142.

Skills: problem solving, critical analysis, decision making

Duration: one hour

Group Size: any size

Setting: indoors

Vocabulary: insecticide spray, galls, gall-makers, prescribed burning, dilemma, habitat, insects, fire break

Materials: four index cards for each student, copies of the background information sheets, coloured markers



Background

The following dilemmas are designed to help students understand and explain different types of human perspectives related to fire management issues. They will formulate informed judgments about what they think would be the most responsible and appropriate actions to take. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Teachers are encouraged to have students do additional research so that decisions are based on the best factual information available.

Activity

A. The original opinions

1. Give each student a coloured marker and four index cards. Have the students write a letter on each card (A-D) which will correspond to the opinions listed below. On the board write the following information:

- A - Definite NO
- B - Uncertain NO
- C - Uncertain YES
- D - Definite YES

2. Read aloud each "Dilemma Phrase" to the entire class. Instruct students to think about the dilemma and choose an "opinion letter." When the class is ready, have students hold up their index cards with

the letter facing you. Ask several students why they chose the opinion they did. For each dilemma, tally the results and record the number of students choosing each of the four opinions on the board. (You may choose to have the students make bar graphs representing the class's original opinion for each dilemma)

DILEMMA PHRASES:

Should all fires in the forest, both natural and human-caused, be put out?

Is prescribed burning a good idea? Prescribed burning is the intentional, planned use of fire to: prepare a site for regeneration, e.g., planting or seeding following harvesting; reduce build up of forest fuels; alter habitat; maintain vegetation to benefit wildlife; or maintain ecosystems.

B. The Informed Decisions

1. Divide the class into four groups (two for each dilemma). Give each group a copy of the Dilemma Background Information Sheet for their dilemma.

2. Groups are to read their Dilemma Background Information Sheet. Students may further research newspaper and magazine articles or talk to local experts and fire agency people. After considering all the information and sides of the issue, the group will then formulate an informed group decision.

3. Have each group present their findings and their informed decision to the class. The class is encouraged to ask questions. After each group's presentation, each student in the class will make their own informed decision about the dilemma. Have the students hold up an index card containing the letter corresponding to their decision. The class-informed decision is tallied and new bar graphs may be drawn.

Discussion

Compare the original opinions and informed decisions. Discuss the importance of learning about all sides of an issue before making a decision or forming an opinion. Opinions and decisions are based on available information, which may or may not be complete or accurate. How can the public get the information they need to make researched decisions? Discuss as well the need to be open to new information which might change opinions.

Evaluation

Students will create an informational brochure which explains prescribed burns, giving examples of where fire might be used as a management tool and listing factors which might affect the use of fire as a tool.

Extensions

1. This activity can be repeated for other resource issues.

2. Focus on Forests, Activities: Forest Values, Intermediate/Senior Manual, pg. 142 - 144; To Spray or Not to Spray, Intermediate/Senior Manual, pg. 172 - 178

Additional Information

Fire Management

In the past, fire management objectives in Ontario developed into a policy of total suppression—an attempt to suppress all fires in Ontario at all costs. This policy proved both impractical, uneconomical and unnecessary.

Foresters and resource managers realize that fire is an important part of the ecological cycle. It plays an important role in the natural regeneration of the forest.

In 1991, the Ministry of Natural Resources developed new objectives for fire management in Ontario.

They are:

- To prevent personal injury, value loss and social disruption resulting from a forest fire.
- To promote understanding of the ecological role of fire and utilize its beneficial effects in resource management.

Resources

Focus on Forests, Intermediate/Senior, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Wildfires: Should we let them burn or put them out?, National Geographic World, v (177), May, 1990 pg. 10

Wildfire: it's a hot topic, National Geographic World, v (169), Sept. 1989 pp. 26-31

The Book of Fire, by William H. Cottrell Jr.; ISBN 0-87842-255-2