

The Invasive Plant Race

Objective: To teach students about the problems caused by invasive plants, the ways that invasive plants can be introduced and ways in which they can be controlled.

Materials: One or two pieces of felt, laminated plant and animal pictures (with Velcro on the back), game cards.

How to play: Before playing the game, you should have a short discussion about native and invasive plants. If you have a large class, this game can be done as a “race” between two teams. A smaller class can do it as a class activity. If done as a race, use 2 sets of games. The winning team will be the one with the most natural (native) ecosystem at the completion of the game.

- Mount the piece of felt to the wall (or board). The felt can also be glued to a piece of strong cardboard or foam-core board. This is your ecosystem. Use green felt for a terrestrial system, blue felt for a pond or river system.
- Stick 2 or 3 plants and 2 or 3 animals onto the felt.
- Players take turns selecting a game card. They read the card aloud, and do as instructed on the card.
- The game ends when all players have selected and played one card.
- Add up the number of native plants, native animals, and invasive plants.

Questions for discussion:

1. If the game was played as a race, which team had the “healthier” ecosystem? Was either ecosystem completely free of invasive species?
2. What natural events had an impact on the ecosystem? What human-caused events were there?
3. Why did you have to remove some animals when you added invasive plants to the system? Why did you add animals when you removed invasive plants from the system?
4. What are some characteristics of invasive plants that you learned during the game?
5. Give an example of an invasive plant found in NE Florida.

Follow-up:

Have students research an invasive plant. Where does it come from? Find that country on a map. How was it brought to Florida? When? Where in the state is it found? Is it found in any other states in the US? How is it being controlled? Some useful websites include <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu> and <http://nas.er.usgs.gov>.