

Wildfire: Friend or foe?

(http://www.ccg.org/resources/learning_centre/classroom_activities/wildfire.asp)

Overview

Every summer in Canada, the news is full of stories about “forest-fire season” and how “this is shaping up to be the worst fire season on record”. We only ever see forest fires in a negative light because so much of what we hear is concerned with the danger and destruction that fires cause. Students need to gain a perspective on fires that includes both the positive and negative aspects of wildfires.

This is (slightly) adapted from a lesson called “*Investigative Report: Perspectives on Fire*” in the Canadian Forestry Association book “*Forest Fires: Handle with Care*”. It is an excellent resource with activities for all grade levels.

Objectives

Students will be able to understand positive and negative effects of wildfire and analyze positions on fire management.

Subject

Science / Language Arts / Social Studies

Geographic Skills

Interpreting, analyzing, defining, oral communication, inferring, evaluating

Background

See the [Canadian Forestry Association](#) website for the background information. It can be found on pages 17 and 21 of the “*Forest Fires: Handle with Care*” book or PDF file.

Activity

1. Go over background material on wildlife corridors with students in order to give them a base of knowledge to use during the next phase. This background material includes the “Middle Springs Wildlife Corridor” and anything else that you feel is necessary.
2. Have students conduct library research to uncover as much about wildfires and prescribed burns as they can.
3. Have students participate in a role-play activity. Describe the following scenario to students. You are members of a community in a forested area. Recently there was a forest fire that came very close to the town-site (If you live in Salmon Arm, B.C. or Penticton, B.C. or sections of northern Alberta, you know what this feels like.) Although no serious harm was done and the fire was successfully put out, people in the community are very concerned about the ongoing risk of forest fire to their community. The local TV station is doing an investigative report on this topic.
4. Divide the class into groups. Each group will select a role to play. Some ideas are listed below. Discuss with the class some of the perspectives each group might have on fire in their community. Some concerns each group might have are listed along with each role.
 - o Park Manager- biodiversity, maintaining wildlife habitat, public safety in recreation areas
 - o Forest Manager- managing the forest resource, reducing fuel load, public safety
 - o Homeowner adjacent to the Forest- natural beauty of the area, safety for your family, insurance costs
 - o Timber company- access to timber, profits, company stability
 - o Environmental/conservation group- preservation of the environment, wilderness experience

- o Town council- creating fire breaks around town, cost of fire-fighting, economic development
- o Other Characters suggested by students

Have one group be the media group. This group should prepare a general report on forest fires and prepare interview questions for each of the other characters. Have the other groups prepare for their interview by answering these questions:

- a) How would you feel about fire in your area?
 - b) Would you feel differently if it was a lightning-caused or human-caused fire?
 - c) List your positive and negative views about fire.
 - d) What, if anything, should be done to protect your community from fire?
5. Have each group present their material to the rest of the class by role-playing the TV News report. You can videotape the role-play and replay it before the final discussion
 6. Following the role-play, in large group, discuss the similarities and differences between the groups' perspectives. Address how education about fire management may influence some people's opinions.

Evaluation and Assessment

Option 1- After the role-play, have students regroup and choose which group they identify with the most.

Option 2 - Have the students do a poster that incorporates all of the different factors and viewpoints expressed during the role-play.

Option 3 - Have students design a poster where half of the class display the positive effects of fire and half display the negative.