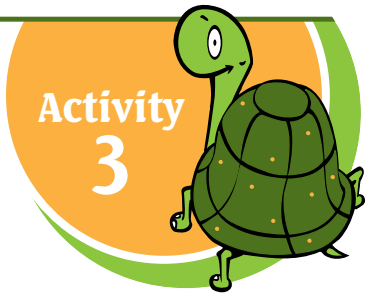
Turtle Island



Hook: The Earth on Turtle's Back

Read the following turtle creation myth (Onondaga version) to the participants.

Skywoman Descending Great Turtle Island by Arnold Jacobs (Onondaga) Copyrighted 1981.

Before the Earth existed, there was only water. In the Clouds was Skyland, where a sacred Great Tree grew. The Great Tree had branches that pointed to the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West).

An Ancient Chief lived in Skyland. His wife was with child and she had a dream that the Great Tree was uprooted. Dreams were very important to the Ancient Chief. The Ancient Chief and his men tried to pull the tree loose, but the taproot was very deep.

Finally, the Ancient Chief, using all his energy, managed to loosen the soil from around the tree. It was uprooted and laid upon its side. However, the tree left a large hole in Skyland. The Ancient Chief's wife looked down the hole and saw something glittering like water. She steadied herself on the branches of the Great Tree. However, the branch snapped and broke and she fell down endlessly.

Two Swans (Canada Geese) saw the falling Sky Woman and flew up to help her so as to cushion her fall. They then realized that Sky Woman was not like them; she did not have webbed feet or waterproof feathers. This creature could not live in the water. All the animals decided that she would die if they did not think of a plan to save her.

After much discussion, they decide that she was made to live on Earth. However, the only Earth was at the bottom of the continuous oceans and streams. The Duck, the Beaver and the Loon all tried to bring Earth from the bottom to the

Age range: 8 to 12
Time: Two 60-minute periods
Themes: The interdependence of habitat components, importance of turtle habitat protection, similarities between human and turtle survival needs and traits.

Resources:

- class set of *Turtle Habitat Role Cards*
- class set of *Ontario Turtles Info Sheet*
- scissors
- pencils
- space for role-play
- large ball of string or yarn

For Extension:

- computer lab loaded with Adobe Flash Player

Learning Outcome:
Students investigate the interconnections between various components in a turtle's ecosystem by participating in a role-play activity and completing a worksheet.

top of the water. They all failed. Then the Muskrat, decided to try. He took on a determined look and went up and down, until finally he loosened some Earth. However, they knew Earth did not float on water, so Turtle volunteered to carry Earth on his back. Muskrat put Earth on Turtle's back, where her paw marks still remain to this day.

After Earth reached Turtle's back, it began to increase in size until it became what we today call Turtle Island – or North America. The Swans flew down carrying Sky Woman to her new home. Sky Woman relaxed and opened her hand that held leaves and seeds from the Great Tree. The seeds fell to Earth, germinated and many new trees grew on Turtle Island.

Life on Earth had begun. Today Mother Earth provides us with food, air, water and shelter.

Caduto, Michael J. and Joseph Bruchac, Keepers of the Earth. Golden, CO: Fulcrum, Inc., 1989

Role-Play Activity: Recreating a Turtle Eco-system

1. With participants standing in a circle, explain that we are all now part of a turtle-dependent ecosystem.
2. Give each participant a Turtle Habitat Role Card (see next 3 pages) and have them read their role to the group. Let participants keep their card for reference.
3. Discuss the interdependence of various components of the ecosystem, noting some of the less obvious relationships, such as a turtle's dependence on rocks and reeds for cover, sun to provide warmth for incubating eggs.
4. As group leader, give the end of the ball of string to a participant. As per their Role Card, this person states who they are and their role in the turtle ecosystem. Another participant in the circle who feels that they are connected to this component says: "I am connected", and explains the relationship as per their Role Card. The ball of string is then passed to this participant. Continue this process until each component is connected at least once to other turtle habitat components.
5. Ask participants to think about what happens when one of the components in a turtle's habitat is negatively affected or removed. Illustrate this point by asking one participant to gently pull the string. All those who feel a tug on their string should then pull, symbolizing the negative affect upon them. All components will eventually feel the pull of the original negative impact.
6. Discuss how each of these components is necessary for turtle survival, and how humans can help protect turtle habitat.

Note: *This activity is adopted with permission from 'Fire Ecosystems,' page 79, "Focus on Fire: A Forest Fire Education Supplement for Teachers and Resource Educators" published by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in partnership with the Ontario Forestry Association, 1998.*

Extension

Have students return to their desks and draw a flow chart illustrating the relationships of the Turtle Habitat components.

AIR

I contain oxygen that turtles need to survive.

SUN

I provide warmth for eggs and turtles.

TREE

I shade and cool the land and water.

REED

I provide shelter from predators.

ROCK

I provide shelter from predators.

WATER

I provide shelter from predators.

BUG

I provide food for turtles.

TOAD

I provide food for turtles.

FROG

I provide food for turtles.

TADPOLE

I provide food for turtles.

GRUB

I provide food for turtles.

BERRY

I provide food for turtles.

GREEN LEAF

I provide food for turtles.

GRASS

I provide food for turtles.

ALGAE

I provide food for turtles.

MOLLUSC

I provide food for turtles.

EARTHWORM

I provide food for turtles.

DEAD FISH

I provide food for turtles.

MUSHROOM

I provide food for turtles.

FLOATING LOG

I provide a sunny perch.

MALE TURTLE

I provide a mate for females of my species.

LOOSE SOIL, SAND OR GRAVEL

I provide nesting for turtle eggs.

MUSKRAT BURROW

I provide a shelter from predators.

TREE ROOT

I provide a shelter from predators.

BEAVER POND

I provide a shelter from predators.

POND-BOTTOM MUD

I provide a place for hibernating.

Creative Writing Activity: Turtles at Risk Code of Conduct

1. Ask the class to list several well-known codes of conduct. These can include classroom, library and cafeteria rules, Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, religious and personal ethic codes of conduct.
2. Invite one or two students to go to the chalkboard or paper easel. Ask the class to brainstorm phrases for a Code of Conduct for Hallway Behaviour.
3. Ask the class to explain why we need rules for our behaviour. Discuss why we need rules for how we treat the species with which we share our planet. Ask students to think about how their efforts – however small - can make a difference for turtle survival in and around their community. (e.g., I/we will refrain from dumping garbage in the community creek.)
4. Ask students to read the *Ontario Turtles Info Sheet*, particularly the section entitled: *How You Can Help Save Turtles!*
5. Now, ask each student to write a Code of Conduct that their school or community could abide by in order to protect turtles and turtle habitat. Each Code of Conduct should contain from 10 to 30 items, reflecting the following goals:
   - protect forests and wetlands
   - conserve forests and wetlands
   - prevent shoreline erosion
   - reduce noise, air and water pollution
   - protect turtle road-crossing areas
   - avoid human contact with turtles
   - support wetland clean-up activities
   - reduce invasive species
   - ensure dog control
   - control use of recreational watercraft
   - support government regulations
   - develop educational programs
   - create marketing tools
6. Students should include a short introduction to their Code of Conduct summarizing their vision.
7. Ask the students to present their Codes of Conduct, and explain why each item is included.

Extension

Students can go online to learn more about the challenges turtles face in their lifecycle by playing the interactive game: ***Survivor Turtle – The 1% Challenge.***
http://www.bonnecherepark.on.ca/html/programs/resources-turtles.html