



The Ultimate Journey

ACTIVITY 1: ECOSYSTEM HEROES

OVERVIEW

Through a guessing game, Club members learn about the essential services that nature provides, such as clean air, food, materials to build homes, and fuel for energy. They brainstorm ways they can be an “Ecosystem Hero” and decorate paper grocery bags with an environmental message to encourage people to reuse the bags.

OBJECTIVE

To help members discover the essential life benefits we receive from nature and explore ways they can help our environment.

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:

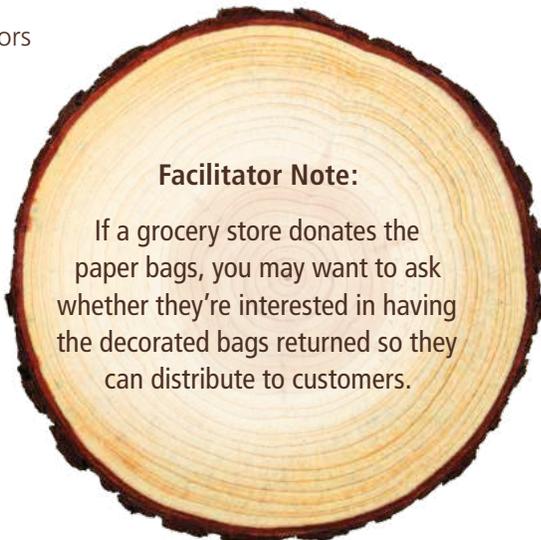
5-20

TIME REQUIREMENT:

50 minutes

LOCATION:

Indoors



Facilitator Note:

If a grocery store donates the paper bags, you may want to ask whether they’re interested in having the decorated bags returned so they can distribute to customers.



MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Colored markers
- Plain paper grocery bag for each member (Grocery stores often give free bags for environmental lessons.)

As many of the following items as possible to display on a table:

- Glass of water
- Plant
- Plate with a variety of fruits and vegetables
- Pin wheel
- Piece of wood, a large stone and a nail
- Coffee filter, cup of muddy water, jar
- Pictures or photographs of a honeybee, forest and beautiful scenery
- Soil in a pot
- Empty bottle or jar with a top

LINKS TO RESOURCES:

- National Park Service: For a brief overview of environmental services nature provides us, visit the following National Park Service website: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/biodiversity/services-provided-by-biodiversity.htm>
- Eight Ways Kids Can Help the Environment: This short video shows simple things Club members can do to help the environment: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vONBU7btYuo>
- Scholastic: This Scholastic website includes 11 videos and activities that introduce youth to ecosystems: <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/activity/ecosystems-11-studyjams-interactive-science-activities>
- PBS Kids: This PBS Kids Plum Landing website includes a variety of online games and videos that help youth learn about our natural world: <http://pbskids.org/plumlanding/parents/allresources.html>
- The Greens: This upbeat, interactive website developed by WGBH gets kids thinking about their world and ways they can help our planet. Through online games, short videos and blogs, kids explore green living, sustainability, ecology, environmental care and social equity: <http://www.meetthegreens.org>

KEY TERMS:

Ecosystem: All plants and animals living in a particular area and their interactions with the nonliving parts of the environment, such as air, water, soil, rocks. Examples include forest, marsh, desert and ocean.

Hero: A person who is admired for their courageous acts or noble character.

Ecosystems services: Those things that we get from nature that help us live, such as food, clean air and water and materials to build houses.

WARM WELCOME: (2 MINUTES)

- Greet each Club member by name as they enter your program area.
- Engage in meaningful conversation with youth.

COMMUNITY BUILDER: HERO CIRCLE (8 MINUTES)

- Have members form a circle. Ask one member to start with the ball in their hand, say their name and name their hero, which can be a family member, teacher, BGCA leader, athlete and so forth. Have members explain why they chose that person.
- Have members take turns passing the ball until all members have had an opportunity to talk about one of their heroes.

MAIN ACTIVITY: ECOSYSTEM HEROES (30 MINUTES)

Before you start:

- Preview information in the **Links to Resources** section to select those appropriate for your members.
- If your group has not already done the **Build Your Group Agreements Lesson Plan** from the **Implementation Guide**, build time into your schedule to do so.
- Gather as many of the items listed below as you can. Display the items on a table in the front of the room. The items represent different ecosystem services as described in the table.



The Ultimate Journey

Item	Represented Ecosystem Service
Glass of water	Clean water.
Plate of food	All food comes from our environment.
Piece of wood, copper wire, stone, nail	Items we use to build houses come from nature.
Pin wheel	Wind energy, a renewable resource.
Potted plant	Plants give off oxygen we need to breathe during photosynthesis.
Coffee filter, muddy water, jar	Soil cleans water by filtering out pollutants. Demonstrate by pouring muddy water through a coffee filter into a jar.
Picture of a forest	Habitat for plants, animals and humans.
Picture of beautiful scenery	Parks and natural places important for relaxation and recreation.
Picture of a honeybee	Pollinators provide an ecosystem service, essential for pollinating crops and for food production.
Soil in a pot	Represents healthy soil needed to grow plants and food.
Empty bottle or jar with a top	Trees and other plants help provide clean air by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Trees also absorb air pollutants. A single tree can absorb 10 pounds of air pollutants a year and produce nearly 260 pounds of oxygen - enough to support two people!

Introductory comments:

- Before beginning the main activity, review the Group Agreements by asking: Does everyone commit to upholding the Group Agreements? Is there anything we should add? Is there anyone new who still needs to commit to the Agreements?
- Tell members that they are going to discover the how they can become environmental heroes.
- Stamp or sign **The Ultimate Journey Passport** for each member, and recite **The Ultimate Journey Pledge**.

Step-by-step process:

Step 1

Engage members by asking, **“What do you need to live?”** (*Answers: Clean air, clean water, energy, food, shelter, clothing and places for outdoor activities.*)

Now have Club members look at all the items on the table. Ask them **what they think the items represent** (*Answer: Together the items represent the ecosystem services that we get from nature every day, such as clean water and air.*) Explain that ecosystem services are the services, or benefits, that are provided to us by nature.

Hold up each item on the table one-by-one, and ask members to guess what ecosystem service it represents. Discuss each one using the table above for explanations.

Step 2

Discuss how our environment is a hero every day by providing the resources we need to survive.

Tell members that they can be environmental heroes by doing simple things to help the environment, such as turning off lights when no one is in the room. In small

groups or all together, have members brainstorm 10 things they can do to help the earth. Ask members to share their ideas. Following are possible ideas:

- Taking your own bags to the grocery store
- Turning off lights
- Recycling
- Using reusable water bottles and lunch bags
- Turning off water faucets when not in use
- Using natural light from windows to light a room
- Unplugging devices that draw electricity even when they are not in use, such as phone chargers and TVs
- Using both sides of paper
- Saving scrap paper for notes and crafts
- Planting trees to absorb air pollutants
- Properly disposing of used batteries and electronics at hazardous waste collection sites
- Holding a park or stream clean-up day

Encourage members to adopt those actions every day.

Step 3

Discuss how reusing items helps save our resources, a good way to help our environment. Explain that they are going to decorate a paper grocery bag with an environmental message and art work to encourage people to reuse grocery bags, or better yet, to bring their own reusable bags to the store.



The Ultimate Journey

Step 4

Give each member a plain paper grocery bag and a variety of colored markers. Before members start decorating their bags, have them take time to think about the environmental messages they want to put on the bags. They may want to sketch their ideas and slogans on scrap paper first. Allow members time to design and decorate their bags. Once they are done, have members take turns holding up their bags and talking about their designs and messages.

REFLECTION AND RECOGNITION: (5 MINUTES)

Reflection:

Discuss how members' slogans can inspire others to reuse items. Ask them if they think they can adopt one or more of the things they brainstormed. Discuss how this will make them ecosystem heroes.

Recognition:

Give a shout-out or acknowledge in another way:

- Group members who worked extra hard on their designs and illustrations
- Group members who were helpful and polite to other Club members

CLOSING: (5 MINUTES)

- Ask members to return materials to designated areas.
- Ask if everyone knows where they'll be going next, and make sure they're clear about instructions and expectations.

ASSESSMENT:

Members should be able to describe what ecosystem services means and list at least two ways they can help our environment.

