



# Decomposers

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**Activity Name: Decomposers**

**Ages:** 6-12

**Activity Level:** low

**Length of time:** 30-40

**Number of Participants:** 10

**Concept:** This activity explores the role and abundance of decomposers in a forest ecosystem, as well as the questions of what is alive and what is dead.

**Materials Required:** Journals or index cards.

**Introduction:** Participants are told that they will be recording the amount of life in an area of forest that might be their special spot.

**Methods:** Participants are asked to go out into a forested area and choose a spot roughly 2ft by 2ft to call their own (hula hoops or transect squares can help to delineate the area more clearly). While they are there they are asked to write a list of all of the items within their area using plant and/or bug names if they know them. (For example: moss, Alder leaves, pebbles, spider, woodbugs, beetles, worms, Douglas Fir needles, Salal, seeds, Douglas Fir cones). Next we gather together where we started and review each of our lists, helping everyone out with names or spelling or writing. (This is a great time to send participants back to their areas to check and see what else they can find and add items to their lists). Then (in a group) we put an arrow pointing up beside everything on our list that is alive and an arrow pointing down for everything that is dead. This often creates a great conversation about what is alive or dead (ie. is soil alive, is a seed alive?). Then we write a recycling arrow beside anything on our list that is a decomposer. This also creates a great conversation about what a decomposer is and what it does. Once they have labelled everything on their list, we discuss what the forest would look like without the work of decomposers.



Then we return to our areas and choose something we know for sure is dead, then bring it back to the circle (for example, a decomposing leaf). Participants are asked to name their item and prepare a eulogy about their life before they died. (For example, "Red

the leaf. Lived for a year on the Alder tree named Bob, produced a lot of oxygen for the animals and humans in the forest, shared many laughs with the other leaves and enjoyed a few good wind storms. Unfortunately, Red started to lose his green chlorophyll robustness and started to take on a beautiful orangey-red colour. Then, one day recently, he fell to the forest floor"). Once all the eulogies have been delivered, participants are asked to take their fallen item to their area and place it on or near something (such as a seed) that would benefit from the nutrients that will be released once fully decomposed.

**Literature Cited:**

This activity is adapted from the "Rediscovery" program:

Henley, Thom. Rediscovery: Ancient Pathways, New Directions. Renton: Lone Pine, 1996.