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Learning Hunts Are Educational Scavenger Hunts

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Abstract: Research has shown that integrating subjects provides opportunities for more relevant, less fragmented, and more stimulating experiences for learners (Furner and Kumar, 2007). Learning Hunts allow students to take ownership of their learning through valuable and connected experiences while staying engaged the entire time.

Keywords: student-centered, integrated curriculum

Introduction

Are you always pressed for time to finish your state’s curriculum? Would you like for students to realize the value of all subjects in school? Does your principal say you need to keep your students “engaged?” If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, Learning Hunts are what you need in your classroom! Learning Hunts include interactive task cards that use technology and multiple resources such as books, poems, and other supplemental materials to introduce or conclude a unit of study.

Literature Review

What is an integrated curriculum? An integrated curriculum, also known as an interdisciplinary curriculum, is defined in the Greenwood Dictionary of Education as “an instructional model whereby multiple disciplines are used to promote and/or enhance learning about a particular topic or skill. This supports the belief that students have greater focus and understanding when content is experienced in a variety of contexts” (Collins & O’Brien, 2003 p.186). An integrated curriculum develops the child’s ability to transfer their learning to other settings and build on relationships in a holistic manner.

What is student-centered learning? While there is a large body of theoretical and anecdotal literature, there is no agreed-upon definition for the overall concept of student-centered learning. Some theorists provide a broad definition such as “students have a choice in their

learning,” while others provide specific principles (Kaput, 2018). Some of the principles agreed upon surrounding student-centered learning include voice, choice, real life relevancy, and proof of mastery.

In a truly student-centered learning environment, teachers and students work collaboratively to co-create a learning plan that best suits the needs of each learner (Green & Harrington, 2020). Teachers should allow their students’ interests to drive the content, skills, and concepts covered which should also be relevant to the students’ lives. Teachers should offer a variety of product options (proof of mastery) based on what they know about their students. This could mean creating choice boards which allow students to share what they learned.

What does the research say about integrating subjects? Research suggests that an integrated approach to learning is more brain compatible. The brain learns best in real-life, immersion-style multi-path learning. A fragmented presentation of learning can forever kill the joy and love of learning (Jensen, 1996). Integrating subjects allows for students to see how the world in which we live is connected. Mathematics, when integrated with science, provides the opportunity for students to apply the discipline to real situations that are relevant to the student’s world and presented from the student’s own perspective (Furner & Kumar, 2007).

What does the research say about student-centered activities? Student-centered learning proves to be especially beneficial to economically disadvantaged students and students whose parents have not attended college (McKenna, 2014). Almost without exception, students in any type of interdisciplinary or integrative curriculum do as well as, and often better than, students in a conventional departmentalized program (Vars & Beane, 2001). Learner motivation and learning increase when learners have a say in their own learning and are treated as co-creators in the learning process (McCombs & Whistler, 1997). Interdisciplinary Teamed Instruction has positive effects on student performance, particularly for lower-achieving students. Many schools which have used interdisciplinary instruction for more than two years, reported an overall upward trend in standardized test scores (Burns, 1994). When students get the opportunity to discover new knowledge and apply that knowledge, they are more likely to succeed (Bolak, Bialach, & Dunphy, 2005).

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The benefits of using a student-centered learning approach using integrated subjects include:

- Students gain a deeper understanding of the content
- Students are active participants in their education
- Accommodates for a variety of learning styles
- Develops higher level thinking skills
- Builds collaboration, social/emotional, and/or problem-solving skills
- Gets students interested about learning new things and keeps them wanting to learn

How do learning hunts work?

Students are purposely partnered with someone who will challenge their thinking, work well together, and/or have the same interests. Each student has their own answer sheet. Partners work on one task card at a time. (Sample task cards below.)

Notes to the teacher:

1. Task cards are created and printed as slides in PowerPoint. (Laminate for multiple uses.) (Students record their answers on their answer sheet, not the task card.)
2. Each Learning Hunt should have about 20 task cards. Some task cards such as Task 3 (see above) are duplicated in PowerPoint four times. These kinds of slides don't take long and only require a dictionary, so multiple partners can complete this at the same time.
3. All task cards are placed in one central location (ex. kidney shaped table). If a task card requires a book, place it **INSIDE** of that book to keep things organized.
4. Partners may start with ANY task card. They don't have to go in order. They will return their task card to the central location when they are done and grab another.
5. Some partners may finish the Learning Hunt earlier than others. Always have a few "early finishers" activities available. (See below for examples.)
6. Set a goal and give a prize if the goal is met-MOST students should be able to complete 3-4 task cards within 30 minutes.
7. Students provide the teacher with feedback about the Learning Hunt. The teacher should carefully review this feedback and discard/replace tasks students deemed unbeneficial.
8. Student-Centered Assessment Ideas: Students will choose one option from the choice board to show what they learned. The teacher should create a rubric for grading purposes.

What does the teacher do during Learning Hunts? What else should I know?

- Compiling resources to meet the standard(s) you are addressing and creating the Learning Hunt itself is the most time-consuming task. Once this is completed, your job becomes facilitator!
- During the hunt, the teacher is responsible for floating around the room to help when needed, keep students on task, and/or clear any misconceptions.
- Keep in mind, Learning Hunts use technology for some task cards, so there may be times when the teacher will need to fix issues that arise. *(Always have extra laptops/technology available.)*
- There may be times when a student must work alone for a variety of reasons (behavior issues, student preference, catch-up because of absences, etc.)
- Most Learning Hunts take 3-4 days to complete depending on your learners/schedule but encompasses a vast amount of information!
- The integrated subjects in the Learning Hunt (such as math and reading) should be **review**. For example, if the main focus is science, you do not want to incorporate new math or reading content in the hunt.

Conclusion

Many of us were taught through lecture. The teacher stood in front of the classroom and "taught us" everything we needed to know. Lately, there has been a shift in education that puts the student at the center of their learning. Integrating subjects and student-centered learning fosters a way of learning that students will see in real life (outside of the classroom). Learning Hunts provide students the opportunity to think critically, creatively, and synthesize knowledge beyond the classroom. To make activities such as Learning Hunts a regular part of our instruction, teachers must encourage all stakeholders (ie school districts, politicians, and parents) to allow and support this innovative approach which puts students in control of their learning. Finally, teachers must share with stakeholders, through personal experiences and data, the benefits of integrating subjects through student-centered activities.

Learning Hunts allow students to take ownership of their learning through valuable and connected experiences while staying engaged the entire time.

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About the Author



Leah Bynes is from Grovetown, Georgia. She graduated in May of 2008 from Winthrop University with a B.A. in Elementary Education. In May of 2021, she received a Masters of Education in Teaching at the University of South Carolina with a concentration in Math.

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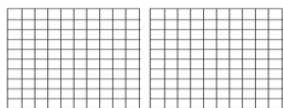
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Name _____ Date _____

5th Grade Ecosystems Learning Hunt

Task 1:

*Write 1.8 in word form. _____



MODEL 1.8

1.8 is between which TWO whole numbers? _____

Task 2:

Get a dictionary. Define the word "herbivore."

Task 3:

Get a dictionary. Define the word "carnivore."

Task 4:

Watch the video and answer the following questions.

- 1. Name 2 abiotic factors mentioned in the video. _____
- 2. Name 2 biotic factors mentioned in the video. _____
- 3. No two organisms can have the same _____.

Task 5: Describe the energy pyramid in NO LESS than 5 sentences. Remember: Sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a punctuation mark.

Task 6:

Get the book The Grasslands by Philip Johansson.

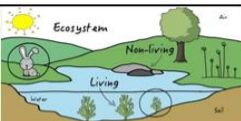
- 1. Use the table of contents to turn to the chapter entitled "Life in the Grasslands." *What does the **caption** say on the first page of that chapter? _____
- 2. Turn to page 6 and read the text underneath the sub-heading "Counting Zebras." *What kind of instrument do scientists use to find out how far away a herd is? _____
- 3. Turn to page 15. Read the text underneath the sub-heading "Grassland Weather." *How much rain do most grasslands get each year? _____
*Do many trees survive in the tropical grassland? Why not? _____
- 4. Turn to the **map** on pages 10-11. What kind of biome do we have in SOUTH CAROLINA? _____ How did you figure it out? _____

Task 7:

Get the book Amazing Biomes Grasslands

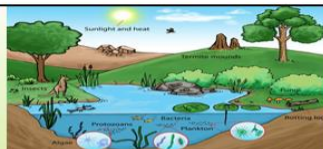
- 1. Read the introduction on page 4. Some parts of the world are large. _____ areas of land covered in _____.
- 2. Use the table of contents to turn to the chapter entitled "**Plants**." Read the bold writing to fill in the blanks.
*Grassland plants have to be _____. In tropical grasslands, plants are _____ by the sun and eaten by _____ and antelope.
*Turn to page 15. What's going on in the two pictures at the top? _____
- 3. Turn to page 20. Since there are few trees in grasslands, where do owls make their homes? _____

Task 3



1. Get a dictionary. Define the word carnivore.

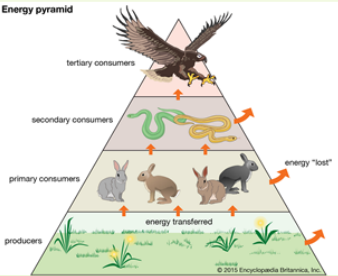
Task 4



▶ Watch the following video and answer the following questions.
▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKJoXdrOT70>

- ▶ 1. Name 2 abiotic factors mentioned in the video.
- ▶ 2. Name 2 biotic factors mentioned in the video.
- ▶ 3. No two organisms can have the same _____.

Task 5



Describe the energy pyramid in NO LESS than 5 sentences. Remember: Sentences begin with a capital letter and end with a punctuation mark.

Task 6

▶ Get the book- The Grasslands by Philip Johansson.

- 1. Use the table of contents to turn to the chapter entitled "Life in the Grasslands."
*What does the caption say on the first page of that chapter?
- 2. Turn to page 6 and read the text underneath the sub-heading "Counting Zebras."
*What kind of instrument do scientists use to find out how far away a herd is?
- 3. Turn to page 15. Read the text underneath the sub-heading "Grassland Weather."
*How much rain do most grasslands get each year?
*Do many trees survive in the tropical grassland? Why or Why not?
- 4. Turn to the map on pages 10-11. What kind of biome do we have in SOUTH CAROLINA? How did you figure it out?

Suggested Resources for Creating Task Cards


Subscriptions to Magazines	Other Resources	Music/Videos
Scholastic News Magazine DynaMath (Scholastic) Super Science (Scholastic) National Geographic Time for Kids	TeachersPayTeachers.com DonorsChoose.org for books, hands-on materials, etc. State Textbooks Nonfiction/Fiction books from your library or school's library	YouTube Brainpop Jr./Brainpop Flocabulary

<p>Create a PowerPoint, Display, or write/perform a song of the- "Top 5 Things I Learned."</p>	<p>Create a web explaining how Ecosystems are connected to reading/writing, math, science, and social studies.</p>	<p>Create an article on the importance of the Ecosystem.</p>
<p>Create a game based on new information you learned from the Learning Hunt. It must include directions on how to play and be for 2+ players.</p>	<p>Conduct a survey for 1/2 of the students in our class on the most interesting thing they learned. Create a graph with this data.</p>	<p>Student Choice-Please get the teacher's approval.</p>

<p>Learning Hunt Reflection</p>		
<p>Which task number was your favorite? _____ Why?</p>	<p>Which task number was your least favorite? _____ Why?</p>	<p>What questions do you still have after completing this learning hunt?</p>
<p>Do you have any connections with any of the tasks? Which one? _____ What are they? (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world)</p>	<p>What's one thing you learned from this learning hunt?</p>	<p>Did you like working with your partner? _____ Why or why not?</p>

EARLY FINISHERS ACTIVITY

Dream Ecosystem
Preview these wordless picture books by Aaron Becker for inspiration.



1. Draw a picture of your dream ecosystem.
2. On the back of your picture, create a t-chart and list at least 3 of the biotic/abiotic factors in your ecosystem.

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Early Finishers #2

- A Haiku is a Japanese poem that does not rhyme. It is a poem that describes something in nature. Haiku poems have three lines, with a certain number of syllables in each line.
- The Haiku formula is Line 1 = 5 syllables Line 2 = 7 syllables Line 3 = 5 syllables.
- Write a Haiku about the ecosystem on the paper provided. (See example below.)

Abiotic rain

Falling on my windowpanes

Drip drop! They fall down.

