

Ad-libbed Aliens

Location: RiverWalk Learning Station 3
Program Levels: Brownie, Junior, Cadette

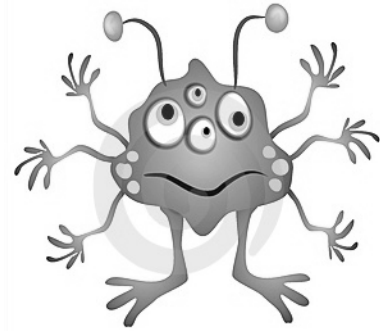
Objective: Girls will become familiar with the concept of invasive plants and recognize that invasive species are equipped with adaptations that give them advantages over native species.

Materials Provided

- Ad-lib story sheets
- Truth is Stranger than Fiction!* cards & pictures
- Dry erase markers

Materials Needed

- ❖ Paper
- ❖ Markers and/or colored pencils



Activity Steps

1. Introduce girls to the game. Briefly show them the story with blanks and explain that they will have to offer words to fill in the blanks *before* they read it.
2. Collect words to fill in each blank in the first story. Write them in with the provided dry erase marker, then read the girls the story they've created.
3. Share the *Truth is Stranger than Fiction!* card for that story and show the picture of the corresponding invasive plant. Talk about what adaptations the invasive species has that could give it a survival advantage over native plants (for example, kudzu's ability to grow up to one foot a day). Use the discussion questions to help you get started.

Juniors and Cadettes only

4. Design your own super alien. Make sure your plant has at least two to three adaptations that allow it to outcompete native plants. Draw a picture of your plant and label its adaptations. Describe the invasive plant's native climate and the eco-system it is invading.

Discussion Questions

- **Why are some plants able to take over an area?** Most invasive plants have adaptations that give them advantages over native plants. These adaptations can actually kill other plants (i.e. toxins released into the soil), or they can just make it easier for the invasive plant to grow and reproduce (exploding seed pods and thick ground cover).
- **What were some adaptations that the *Truth is Stranger than Fiction!* plants had?** Quick growing, poisonous, exploding fruits that spread their seeds far and wide, etc.
- **Are all non-native plants invasive?** No. Some non-native plants lack the adaptations that invasive need to take over from native plants.
- **Is a plant that is invasive in Virginia invasive all over the world?** No. For example, kudzu is invasive here, but it is a native plant in southern Japan and southeastern China. Because of differing conditions in those areas, the plant is not as destructive as it is here.

Extensions

On the Trail

Create your own *Ad-libbed Alien* story! You can base it off of a real invasive plant or one of the plants you designed (Juniors and Cadettes).

Beyond the Trail

Help with a local effort to remove invasive plants and restore native habitats. Here are a few of the area organizations with non-native plant removal programs:

Anacostia Watershed Society - <http://www.anacostiaws.org>

Maryland Native Plant Society - <http://www.mdflora.org>

Virginia Native Plant Society - <http://www.vnps.org>

West Virginia Native Plant Society - <http://www.wvnps.org>