

Objectives

- ▶ use knowledge of reefs and reef inhabitants to create an “underwater” nature trail
- ▶ write rules to protect the reef

Vocabulary

nature trail

dive site

Background

One of the questions SFS students at the South Caicos research site will try to answer this semester is: “What is the best way to manage scuba diving activity in the reefs around South Caicos?” Their case study will involve locating and mapping good dive sites and writing rules to protect corals and reef creatures at these sites from the impacts of diving activity.

One tool the SFS students may consider to control the way divers use the reef is an underwater nature trail. Park managers on land use

nature trails to guide visitors to selected special places. Signs along nature trails provide facts that help visitors appreciate the habitats, plants and animals they see.

The signs also state the rules for using the trail. Rules like: Stay on the trail. Keep our park clean. Please do not pick the wildflowers. An underwater nature trail would introduce divers to the wonders of the reef surrounding South Caicos and protect this special environment from diver damage.



Materials

shoe boxes
construction paper

colored pencils

markers

Activity

1. As a class, brainstorm several favorite habitats to use as “dive sites” on the underwater trail. For example, the cave of an octopus, the den of a moray eel, the cleaning station of a cleaner shrimp, or the reef edge.
2. Divide students into teams. Assign each team a dive site on the nature trail.
3. Have each team research its site. Ask each team to write a description of the habitat at its site and to list the plants and animals that would live there.
4. Have students recreate each dive site in the classroom. This may be done in three dimensions using a shoebox diorama, or students may create posters or murals using drawings or photographs.
5. Have teams create an information station for each dive site. This should be a sign that identifies the habitat at the site and lists the plants and animals the “diver” may see at this dive site. Students can include small illustrations to help “divers” identify each of the listed animals. They should also include fun facts about what the animals eat, how they behave and how their adaptations help them survive.
6. With students, set up the “dive sites” and information stations in the classroom, gymnasium or library. Number each site and make a map of the underwater trail.
7. As a group, discuss rules for protecting the habitats and animals along the trail. Have students make signs and choose the best locations to post these rules.
8. When everything is ready, have students put on face masks and fins, strap on their scuba tanks and GO! Invite other classes to “swim” the reef trail.

Extend the Activity

Work with students to create a nature trail to highlight habitats, plants and animals on school grounds. Or get permission for the class to visit another site and map out possible trail stations.

Field Trip

As a class, visit a local park or nature center and walk one of their nature trails. Have each student bring a field journal. Ask them to sketch their favorite trail station and answer these questions: What plants and animals are supposed to live here? Which ones can you see? Are there any rules posted to protect animals and plants along the trail?