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Biomes and Ecosystems

Did you know that there are communities right in your backyard? Do you know that some communities don't have houses, but instead have trees, plants, and shrubs? Well, these communities are part of **ecosystems**. They are also part of **biomes**.



Biomes are large areas that have similar plants, animals, and other **organisms**. Organisms are living things that can work independently. Some of these organisms we cannot see with our eyes. However, they are there.

Ecosystems are smaller than biomes. They are a community of plants and animals that live in an environment.

There are many biomes on Earth. However, we will only talk about four. They are **forests**, **grasslands**, **deserts**, and **tundras**. The animals and plants in these biomes need to adapt to the environment. Each biome has different types of water, soil, and climate.

Forests are trees and other plants that cover a large area. These trees and plants grow in groups that are very dense. Depending on the climate, different types of trees and plants grow in the forest. There are **tropical rainforests**, cold climate **boreal forests**, **temperate deciduous forests**, and **temperate rainforests**. Temperate deciduous forests are found in the eastern United States. These forests have cold winters and warm summers. You can tell you are in a temperate deciduous forest if the leaves change colors in the fall. You will find **temperate rainforests** in the Pacific Northwest. Boreal forests have trees that have cones. You would find pine, fir, and spruce trees in these areas. These forests are found in the high northern latitudes (such as Alaska and Canada) and in high mountains.

Tropical rainforests are found near the equator in different areas of the world. They have a lot of rain. Some of these forests are found in Africa, South America, and Asia.

Grasslands are areas that are covered with grass and very few trees. You know them as prairies in the United States. There are very hot summers and very cold winters in grassland areas. Grasslands have some rain. However, the rain is not enough for trees to grow there.

Deserts are the driest places on Earth. They have very little precipitation during the year. Any plants that are in the desert have to survive the low amount of moisture. You may see cacti in deserts. The U.S. has four deserts. They are the Mojave Desert (Mo-ha-vee), the Great Basin Desert, the Chihuahuan Desert, and the Sonoran (suh-NOHR-uhn) Desert. Did you know that deserts can be either warm or cold places? The entire continent of Antarctica is a desert. It is the largest desert on Earth.

The last biome is tundra. A tundra is a frozen prairie. If you were to visit inside the Arctic Circle or a place

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high in the mountains above the tree line, you would be visiting a tundra. Tundras have summers that are not very hot. The winters are extremely cold. There are plants that grow in the tundra. However, there are not any trees.

Animals that live in these different biomes need to adapt to the climate. They may have thick layers of fur that help to keep them warm in the winter. In summer, they lose some fur for hot weather. Their feeding habits may change with the seasons.

Ecosystems can be very small or very large. They can be as large as the Amazon rainforest. They can also be the small log in your backyard. So take a trip into your backyard or to the park in your neighborhood. There is an ecosystem waiting for you to explore.

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Questions

1. What are biomes?

2. What are ecosystems?

3. _____ have trees with cones.

- A. tropical rainforests
- B. boreal forests
- C. temperate deciduous forests
- D. temperate rainforests

4. Plants in deserts have to survive large amounts of rain each year.

- A. true
- B. false

5. Complete the sentence: Grasslands are areas _____.

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6. Describe tundras.

7. Where are some tropical rainforests found on Earth?

8. What are grasslands called in the United States?
