Cycles of Nature Game
Directions

Goal

To win, you try to make the most matter cycles. (Even though you are making matter cycles, remember that the matter and the energy go together as "food.") A cycle can have just two cards (a producer and a decomposer) or it can have more (consumers that get energy and matter from the things that you connect them to.) However, you only get one point per cycle.

Rules for the Game

1. Play in groups of four to five students. Each player gets five cards.

2. On your turn, ask another player if he or she has a specific card that you want. If not, take a card from the pile.

3. If you have fewer than five cards at any time, take new ones from the pile.

4. When you get a cycle, set it out in a circle on the game board to show the other players. (The spaces are just to show you where to put them. The cards are a little larger than the spaces.) Then take as many new cards as you need to have five total. When you make your next cycle, stack the old one next to the game board and put the new one on the board.

Strategy

You want to construct cycles that are long, if possible, to clear your hand of consumers so you can get more cards. (This is because you NEED a producer and a decomposer to make a cycle.) However, if you wait a long time to make a cycle, someone may ask for your plant or decomposer. You need balance waiting too long with getting consumers out of your hand. Also, think carefully about how you use particular cards. For example, you could use an earthworm to get a toad out of your pile. But if you do, you will have lost a valuable decomposer. If you aren't sure what something eats, look it up. There are a few consumers in the game that also can act as decomposers because they scavenge (look for) and eat dead matter.

Follow-up Questions

1. Why can you make a cycle that has only a producer and a decomposer? How is this like a real ecosystem?

2. Why do you think the game board shows different colors for the cycle above the ground and below the ground?