#10023
EVERGLADES:
HOME OF THE LIVING DINOSAURS

DISNEY EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTIONS, 2001
Grade Level: 6–12
45 mins.
1 Instructional Graphic Enclosed

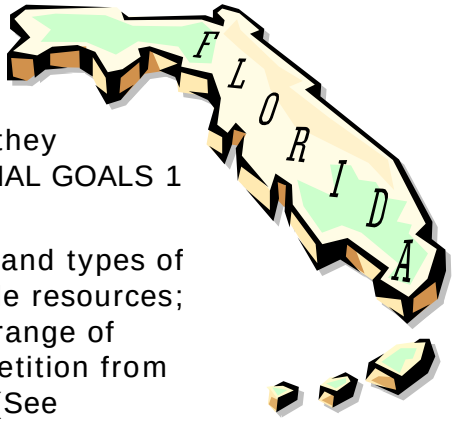
DESCRIPTION

The Everglades in southern Florida hosts a unique ecology of plants and animals over its dry winter and wet summer seasons. The alligator plays a central role in the Everglades' food chain and in the "survival of the fittest" theory. Closeup photography conveys the rich diversity of life in the complex, massive, yet delicate ecosystem that is called the Everglades.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: Science–Life Sciences

- Standard: Understands relationships among organisms and their physical environment
  - Benchmark: Knows that all individuals of a species that exist together at a given place and time make up a population, and all populations living together and the physical factors with which they interact compose an ecosystem (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1 and 2.)
  - Benchmark: Knows factors that affect the number and types of organisms an ecosystem can support (e.g., available resources; abiotic factors such as quantity of light and water, range of temperatures, and soil composition; disease; competition from other organisms within the ecosystem; predation) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 3.)



Subject Area: Geography–Physical Systems

- Standard: Understands the characteristics of ecosystems on Earth's surface
  - Benchmark: Knows plants and animals associated with various vegetation and climatic regions on Earth (e.g., the plant and animal life supported in a midlatitude forest in North America, the kinds of plants and animals found in a tropical rain forest in Africa, animals and trees that thrive in cities) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 2 and 4.)

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INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To introduce the concept of ecosystem.
2. To show the Everglades ecosystem.
3. To identify ways in which the food web of the Everglades is related to dramatic changes in climate.
4. To illustrate the variety of animals that live in the Everglades.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Originally the Everglades River was a few inches deep but up to 50 miles wide and 100 miles long, emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. Today, the Everglades is no longer a free-flowing river. The only part that resembles the original Everglades River is the wetland now found in Everglades National Park.

Vast numbers of animals and plants make their home in the Everglades. More than 50 species of reptiles and 18 species of amphibians live there. Both are cold-blooded animals whose body temperature changes with their surroundings. The subtropical warmth is important to their survival.

Alligators were once on their way to extinction, but as a result of being legally protected, they are plentiful in the south of Florida. Adult alligators can reach ten feet or more in length and weigh 1,000 pounds. They are carnivorous and use their sharp teeth to kill their prey. Because their jaws do not move horizontally, they cannot chew; therefore, they must swallow their prey whole or break it into pieces. Adult alligators usually live 30 to 35 years in the wild.

VOCABULARY

1. adolescent
2. aggressive
3. alligator
4. cold-blooded
5. drought
6. fierce
7. hatchling
8. instincts
9. juvenile
10. mating season
11. predators
12. prehistoric
13. protect
14. reptile
15. species
16. survive/survival
17. swamps
18. territory
19. vulnerable
20. wetland

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Discuss the Everglades. Ask: What do you know about the Everglades? Where are the Everglades? What type of climate might be found in the Everglades?
2. Discuss animals and the food chain. Consider:
   a. How many different reptiles can you name?
   b. Why is the food chain important to the well being and survival of a species?
   c. What are some things that animals in the wild do to escape their predators?
3. Distribute copies of the Video Response Chart. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC.) Fill in the chart while viewing the video.

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DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Consider pausing during the video to allow time for writing on the Video Response Chart.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. Why do you think the alligator is known as the king of the Everglades?
2. Describe the harsh changes in climate in the Everglades.
3. Why do you think water is so important to the health and well being of the Everglades?
4. How long does it take before a young alligator can fend for itself without the protection of its mother?
5. What other animals prey on baby alligators?
6. How do baby alligators manage to survive their predators?
7. Why can alligators have difficulties eating their food?
8. Describe some things about birds in the Everglades.
9. What are some changes that happen in the Everglades in the dry season?
10. Although alligators are the most powerful animals in the Everglades, what do you think they might fear?
11. What aspects of the Everglades itself pose a threat to its environment?

Applications and Activities

1. Use the Video Response Chart to review the content of the video and discuss observations. (See BEFORE SHOWING and INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC.)
2. Research and describe the importance of the following words in relation to the video: predator, prey, food chain, species, ecosystem, habitat, carnivore, and herbivore.
3. Working individually, in pairs, or in small groups, research an animal from the video and report to the class. The report should include:
   a. Name and description.
   b. Description of the Everglades' habitat.
   c. Feeding habits.
   d. Ways of adapting to the changing seasons in the Everglades.
   e. Biggest threats to day-to-day survival (predators and other threats).
   f. At least one interesting fact about the animal that makes it different from other animals.
4. Create a classroom display showing the many different ways in which animals protect themselves from predators, both in the Everglades and elsewhere. Include:

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   a. Camouflage through adaptations in coloring.
   b. Protective skins or shells.
   c. Offensive odors.
   d. Loud noises.
   e. Other ways to ward off predators.
5. Develop an accurate model of the Everglades' ecosystem as a whole. When complete, discuss possible changes to the system and what impact they would have. Consider:
   a. If all the alligators were gone.
   b. If there were no birds.
   c. If there were no changes in the seasons; if it rained all year or was dry all year.
6. Create a display of animal and plant pictures connected by string to show the Everglades' food web. Discuss the relationships of all the elements and why each is important.
7. Work in pairs or small groups to research and report on components of the efforts to save the Everglades. Possible topics include:
   a. State and federal legislation.
   b. Water conservation.
   c. Restoration of natural water flows throughout the south of Florida.
   d. Protection of endangered species.
   e. Protection of alligators.
   f. Creation of the Everglades National Park
8. Debate the topic "Resolved: A Major International Airport Should Be Built Near the Everglades."
9. Work in pairs or small groups; invent an animal that might live in the Everglades. Consider different aspect of the animal. Share the imaginary animals. Consider:
   a. Type of animal (bird, reptile, amphibian, mammal, or fish).
   b. Coloring and appearance.
   c. Animals this resembles.
   d. Ways the animal adapts to the climate and changing seasons of the Everglades.
   e. Preferred foods or prey.
   f. Predators this animal should avoid.

SUMMARY

The Everglades is a vast subtropical wilderness of rich wetlands, grasses, and tree islands. At the top of the Everglades' food chain are alligators, reptiles similar in many ways to their ancestors of 150 million years ago.

More important than any other single factor affecting life in the Everglades is the climate. There are two seasons in a year, each with opposite conditions: a long rainy season followed by a lengthy draught. All creatures in the Everglades must adapt to these challenging conditions, and many do not survive.

The film begins during the midsummer wet season. A mother alligator uses her powerful jaws with motherly tenderness to cradle one of her eggs and help her baby exit the shell. The laws of the food chain immediately come into play.

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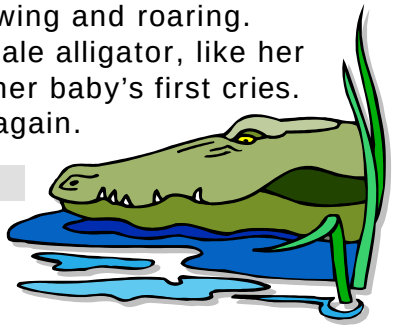
Predators are everywhere. Given the endless pursuit of food, many animals have developed unique survival techniques.

As winter wears on, rainfall is sparse and the animals are forced to adapt. A young alligator and its mother go to a "gator hole" where they can feed.

Spring approaches and storms arrive, promising an end to the drought. The Everglades are still dry, however, and wildfires break out. The alligator mating season begins, and the Everglades echo with reptilian bellowing and roaring. Soon rains will swell the waters of the Everglades. The female alligator, like her mother before her, will build a nest, lay eggs, and wait for her baby's first cries. A cycle of survival more ancient than the dinosaurs begins again.



CMP RELATED RESOURCES

- *Alligator Swamp* #2549
- *The Everglades* #7719

World Wide Web

The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **THE EVERGLADES ECOSYSTEM: THE EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK**

http://www.nps.gov/ever/eco

This site hosted by the national Park Service includes an introduction to the ecosystem of the Everglades, habitats, animal profiles, endangered species, threats and restoration efforts, fire management, geology, history, and more.

Sun-Sentinel.com

- **FLORIDA EVERGLADES: A GUIDE**

http://southflorida.sun-sentinel.com/everglades

This site contains an interactive tour of the Everglades, as well as information on plants and animals, geological history, other history information, and a guide to lodging choices while visiting the Everglades.

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- **CROCODILIAN INTERNET RESOURCES**

This site hosted by the Florida Museum of Natural History contains links to other alligator and crocodile sites that are categorized with a description of each site. Includes sites on general biology, conservation, bibliographies, research, tourism, and more.

http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/natsci/herpetology/brittoncrocs/cir.html

- **CROCODILIANS**

http://ww.geo.tcu.edu/faculty/crocodile.html

This site hosts a list of links to many other sites on animals in the crocodilian family, which includes alligators.

INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC

- VIDEO RESPONSE CHART

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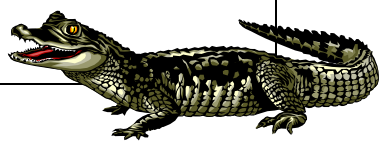
Video Response Chart

Directions: Fill out this chart by making notes as you watch the video. Gather information on at least five different animals shown in the video.

ANIMAL SHOWN IN THE VIDEO	WHAT THE ANIMAL EATS	DAY-TO-DAY THREATS	HOW THE ANIMAL SURVIVES THREATS