

## **Title:** Swamp Tour, Learn and Taste: Swamp to Table

### **Introduction**

From New Orleans to Cutoff, Louisiana has a secret food chain that families can discover on a swamp tour in the morning. Families can then relish together with a meal of Redfish on the shell at a restaurant later that night. Join in this fun activity for the whole family.

### **Background**

Deep in the swamps of Louisiana lie a secret food chain that feeds millions of people in homes and restaurants in Louisiana each year. Chefs as well as moms and dads from around the state prepare the Redfish as a palette of delicious sauces, blackened spices, and a cornucopia of vegetables to create a tantalizing meal for families, travelers and communities.

Questions: From where do those Redfish come and how do the secret ecosystems of swamps and marshlands help to support the fisheries by which the Redfish live?

### **Activity Part 1**

Take your whole family on a swamp tour. You will find an ecosystem that is mysterious from grass shrimp, and marsh worms to Cotton Mouth Snakes, alligators, and even ferrel pigs. You might even see a jumping, crawling or tailing fish along the seagrass or one feeding beneath a flock of diving birds on a bait ball of minnows.

Start your guided journey by gliding across the water on a boat with the wind blowing through

your hair, a little brackish water spray on your cheeks and a large grin on your child's face. Suddenly, behind the bend find a secret waterway that takes you into the belly of the swamp through narrow canals lined with the ancient guardians of the brackish waters. These pillars of bald cypress trees masked in Spanish Moss rise from the dark swamp and act as beacons to your guide as s/he maneuvers the boat down into the grey light and finds the creatures of this mysterious place. As you travel your guide will be exposing the secrets and sharing the knowledge of this hidden ecosystem.

*How to Use this Activity to Extend Your Child's Learning and Even Connect it to your Child's Science Education*

**Start with Some Questions and Encourage** your child to generate their own questions about the swamp ecosystem. Ecosystems are living and non-living systems working together in which plants and animals create circles of life.

Who are the predators and prey in the swamp?

Why does the mighty alligator need the unassuming seagrass or minuscule grass shrimp?

What happens to the leaves, dead birds, and raccoon scat that seems to vanish into the swamp?

What are the invasive species that have battled native species for the right to control the swamp? How have invasive species changed the swamp?

What evidence of humans are in the swamp and how has mankind impacted and changed the ecosystem?

Evidence?

Finally, Ask your kids what questions they have and take notes or even record those questions on your phone so that you can discuss them after the tour.

## **Activity Part 1b**

### Swamp Scavenger Hunt Activity 1 - Beginning Level Game 1

Using a journal or camera, have children identify or document anything they thought was interesting. Tell them you want them to identify both plants and animals.

What do they see in the sky?

What do they see in the water?

What do they see floating on the water?

What do they see at the edge of the swamp?

What do they see in the trees, branches and plants?

What do they hear above them and below them? Even fish like the Redfish drum can make a sound.

What insects do they see buzzing around themselves and maybe even on you?

Ask students to identify as many plants and animals including insects in a journal or camera.

## Swamp Scavenger Hunt Activity 1 - Beginning Level Game 2

Did you see a bird that has a long neck?

Can you find a bird swooping down to the water?

Can you find a bird that is singing a song?

Can you find an alligator?

Can you find a ferrel pig on land and in the water swimming?

Can you find a yellow flower?

Can you find a jumping fish?

Can you find an invasive species based on the guide's information?

Can you find a bird of prey?

Can you find Spanish Moss?

Can you find a Bald Cypress tree?

Can you find a snake?

Total \_\_\_\_\_

## Swamp Scavenger Hunt Activity 1 - Intermediate Level Game

As the child identifies a unique plant or animal by either camera or journal, ask your child to write a brief description of what they see and hear. What size, color, shape, and texture is the creature? Whatsound, if any, do they hear from the creature or from what the creature is doing?

Is it long, skinny, fat, oblong, green etc.?

### Swamp Scavenger Hunt - Advance Level

As the child identifies the plant or animal and describes it, have your child guess whether the creature is predator, prey or both. For example, does the animal have teeth used to eat other animals? Based on the presentation from your guide, your child would document what the animals from the swamp eat and what eats them. In the case of the plants, from what or where do the plants get their nourishment?

### Activity Part 2 - The After Party of the Swamp Tour - Dine Out and Eat up

#### Introduction

Redfish is a mild fish and a delicacy in Louisiana that is served in restaurants throughout the state. The fish survives in swamps just like the one you just saw that are propagated by the delicate balance and health of ecosystems. The fish come from a harsh environment and have adapted with its scaly skin fighting to survive. However, despite its tough skin, the fish has a delicate and mild flavor that will delight your tastebuds. If you order a Redfish on the half shell, you will get to see the scaly skin on the outside filleted with the tender meat on the inside. Go into almost any seafood restaurant in Louisiana and order Redfish or Redfish on the half shell and see how the culture of Louisiana celebrates this delicacy.

As you eat with your family ask your kids about what they saw and heard on their swamp tour. What did they learn?

Lastly, ask them how they are connected to the lowly Seagrass and minuscule shrimp from the swamp at this very moment. What impact have we had on the ecosystem of the swamp? How do we help sustain the fisheries of Louisiana by being good stewards of the swamp?

## **Family to School Connection**

Who are the producers, consumers, and decomposers in the food chain of fish in the swamp? Identify a food chain that supports fish like the Redfish Drum in the swamp.

A food chain is the chain of plants and animals linked together.

## **Activity**

What do fish, such as Redfish, eat in the swamp (such as grass shrimp, crabs, marsh worms)? What do Redfish prey eat (such as grass shrimp?) How does Seagrass get the nutrients it needs? Create a food chain using the photographs and journal entries from the swamp tour. Use this graphic organizer to document the food chain or create a movie from the photos describing the food web of the swamp.

## **Resources**

Tips for Catching Redfish

<https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-catch-redfish-2929674>

Signs of a Redfish in a swamp

<https://tailtailsigns.com/tips-and-articles-2/what-to-look-for/>

Learn more about the Ecosystems of Swamps

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/swamp/>

This activity helps children learn more about Next Generation Science Standard related to ecosystems interactions. This is the fifth grade standard however, there are similar standards for other grade levels as well.

<https://www.nextgenscience.org/dci-arrangement/5-ls2-ecosystems-interactions-energy-and-dynamics>