



Flock “Pecking Order” Simulation Game

Background

Dominance structure is an important feature of how Whooping Cranes relate to members of their species. *Pecking order*, or the urge to fit into social hierarchies, is also powerful in humans. For example, the armed forces depend upon a hierarchical structure for efficiency and discipline. We see hierarchical structures in corporations and other organizations as well as in peer groups and on playgrounds. Sometimes a person so badly wants a higher place in that hierarchy that they turn into a bully. Students will very likely be able to cite how bullying behavior affects their lives, or lives of people they know. Fortunately, as humans we have the ability to reason through this and find much more peaceful ways of settling our disputes. Such discussions are a valuable part of the preparation and follow up for this simulation game.



The young cranes must sort out their social order early – but with supervision from the staff at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

In this game, each student will find his or her place in a pecking order based on the value of a playing card, which they will choose at random. The highest ranking card is a king, followed by queen, jack, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Ace.

Materials

One deck of playing cards

Activity

1. Each student chooses a playing card. WITHOUT looking at it, each places the card above their forehead so that others can see it.
2. For 5 minutes, the students interact with one another. The goal is to interact with people who are at the top of the pecking order. However, students do not know the hierarchical value of their own card. They can only guess this by the way others react to them.
3. At the end of the 5 minutes, and still without having seen their own card, each student lines up according to the place they perceive they fall in the pecking order.

Finally, all players look at their cards and check to see how closely the line formed based on everyone's perceptions.

Discussion

1. How accurate was the pecking order? Did most of the students know where they should stand?
2. Reflect on this experience. Did you correctly perceive where you stood in the pecking order? What did it feel like when people reacted to you the way they did? How does it feel to be in a position of higher or lower status?
3. Can you find examples of how humans are similar and different from animals with regard to social dominance?

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