25: the orchid-killing fields

teachers' notes

1) The answers to these questions are clearly very subjective. The answers posted below reflect the views of the crazy dudes at wipeout.com.au.

2) When 99% per cent of the population – and 90% of outdoor educators! – would struggle to identify orchids in the wild, there would be little residual empathy among the general public for these amazing plants.

suggested answers

1) There are all sorts of reasons why it matters if any species dies out. As David Suzuki has pointed out, our species depends on biodiversity as much as it depends on clean water and air and the like. The presence of native orchids is a gauge of the integrity of the bush, as they are the first plants to disappear after disturbance such as grazing. If orchids die out, in many cases there are specific insects that will die also because of their symbiotic relationship with particular plants.

2) Orchids are arguably the most highly evolved type of plant, mainly because of the very specialised and complex ways in which they attract pollinating insects. They are also, in many cases, stunning in appearance.

3) The Australian bush is so special because it spent 50 million years evolving in isolation, resulting in many unique life forms. What the early Europeans saw when they first arrived was *so* different to what they knew that they were unable to reproduce accurate likenesses (e.g. in sketches and paintings) until decades after their first settlement.

4) Outdoor education classes, to begin with, should:

- learn how to identify orchids and other fragile species;
- avoid activities that might result in the trampling of orchids in areas where they are found during the period that they produce leaves and flower. For example, schools in Perth should not plan orienteering in Wireless Hill Park during Spring!
- investigate which species are endangered in areas that they visit and come up with specific strategies;
- always observe good minimal impact practices.

further information

1) ANOS websites: http://www.anos.org.au/ & http://www.anosvic.org.au/

2) http://www.wildorchidimages.com.au/