Module 3 ~ Why Manage Invasive Plants (MS)

Reading Activity – Water Hyacinth in Florida – Then and Now

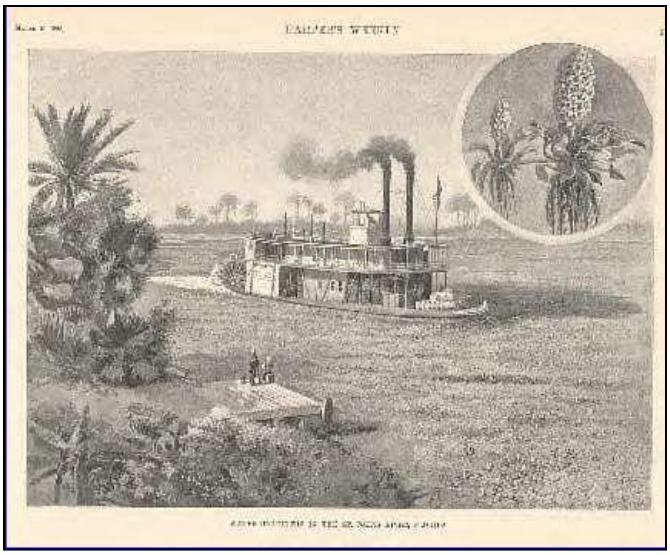
Name: _____ Class Period: _____ Date: _____

Directions: *Read this passage and answer the questions below.*

"WATER HYACINTHS AREN'T SOMETHING WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THESE DAYS," said the fisherman on the St. Johns River. "Used to be, there were so many plants, I couldn't get my boat into the water; but today there's not a problem."

Therein lies a misperception.

The fisherman is partly correct: he is able to get his boat into the river now, because there are relatively few water hyacinth plants there. But this is only because 100 years of hyacinth seek-and-destroy missions have succeeded in greatly reducing the plant population, and keeping them low. For many people, especially people new to Florida, the relatively few water hyacinths don't appear to be a threat at all.



Water hyacinth plants infesting the St. Johns River in north Florida. This illustration was published in an 1898 issue of Harper's Weekly magazine. The author of the magazine article said, "I have seen vessels going at full speed brought to a complete standstill."

However, were it not for at least $70 million worth of management efforts every year in Florida (by city, county, and state agencies), we know that our lakes, rivers, canals and wetlands would again be quickly covered with any number of non-native invasive aquatic plants.

In fact, this $70 million protects billions in Florida's natural and economic resources. Today there are a number of non-native invasive aquatic plants on the loose in Florida's waters and wetlands. Hydrilla, water hyacinth, melaleuca and torpedo grass are well-known and costly invaders. Others, like wild taro, water spinach, West Indian marsh grass, and wetland nightshade have recently been recognized as serious threats. Still others, like Wright's nutrush, water snowflake, Asian marsh weed and giant reed may be making advances without us even knowing it. Invasive plants require constant attention and maintenance control.

For more information on the subject, visit: http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/manage/

Florida Invasive Plant Education Initiative • http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/education
A Collaboration of the UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants
and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission / Invasive Plant Management Section

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1. Are water hyacinth plants currently a problem in Florida?

2. How does the removal of water hyacinth plants affect Florida's current economy?

3. How do you think the water hyacinth affected Florida's economy 100 years ago?

4. What do you think "management effort" means?

5. Aside from navigation problems, what other types of problems could occur from plant infestations?