

On the Right Track

Environmental Education Lesson
EDWARDS CAMP AND CONFERENCE CENTER

Summary

Students will become wildlife detectives learning about and exploring for tracks and other clues to find out what types of animals live in the wilderness around camp.

Usage – Grade levels: K – 7th. All year but winter is especially good for tracking

IL Standards

12.B.1a

12.B.2a; 12.B.2b

12.B.3a; 12.B.3b

Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to...

- Identify at least five clues useful in looking for wildlife.
- Locate clues from at least three animals here at Edwards.
- Define camouflage and other adaptations animals use for hiding.
- Identify the tracks of at least three common animals

Materials

- Box of animal clues
- Pictures of animals
- Clipboard/ pencil for clue collecting
- Dry erase board and markers

Set-Up

- Place out the clue stations for the animal detective activity.

Introduction (10 Minutes)

Animals carry on their day to day business all around camp. Unfortunately most of this activity occurs when people are not around. By learning to look for the right clues, we can put the pieces together to figure out fairly accurately which animals are active and which live here at camp.

By learning to identify tracks and other signs we can study what animals they came from, what they were doing and maybe even where they are going. It is important to look at all the clues. For example, the pattern of an animal's tracks can tell you if they were walking or running. Animals are often closer than you think, you just need to know how and where to look for them.

Animal Detectives (20 Minutes)

Ask the students to name some animals that could live in the wild here in camp. Tell the students that they are going to look for some of those animals. But before they do, they have to know what to look for. They are going to become detectives and what do detectives look

for? Clues of course. Have students try to come up with a list of clues that would indicate animals are in the area. Discuss each clue briefly. Write answers down on the dry erase board. The following are examples of clues:

1. **Tracks**
2. **Scat** (scientific word for droppings)
3. **Territory Markings** (Scratchings/ scent mounds)
4. **Sounds** (calls)
5. **Homes or Nests**
6. **Animal Parts** (feathers/bones/fur)
7. **Bite marks/partially eaten items**
8. **Food Caches**
9. **Smells**
10. **Live Animal**

Now that the students have an idea about what to look for they can investigate some clues that were set up earlier. Divide them up into several groups and let them know that at each station they will need to guess what animal is represented by the signs left. Tell them what animals that they have to choose from

Station	
1	Owl Pellet (Owl)
2	Chewed Jaw Bone (Chipmunk, they chew on bones for the calcium)
3	Nest (Robin, robins make nests out of mud and grass)
4	Fur piece (Coyote)
5	Round Droppings (Rabbit, most herbivores have small round pellets for droppings)
6	Part of Wasp Nest (wasp)
7	Snake Skin (bullsnake, snakes shed their skin as they grow larger)
8	Canine Track (Fox, fox tracks are usually about 1 inch in diameter and show claws, where as a cat track will not show the claw)
9	Hooved Track (Deer)
10	Chewed Wood (Beaver, beavers use the wood for both shelter and food. They only eat the soft outer bark, not the hard inner core)
11	Quills (Porcupine, porcupines do not “shoot” their quills, but will release them into a predator when attacked)
12	Cocoon in jar (butterfly)
13	Wood with trails on it (Insect Larvae, the adults lay eggs under the bark of trees and the larvae hatch and eat the soft inner bark as they grow, later to emerge as an adult)
14	Bird Track (Great Blue Heron, very large, usually found on lake shores)
15	Skull (Snapping Turtle, look at the beak and large head, snapping turtles are the largest turtle around here)

Animal Gaits (10 Minutes)

In identifying animal tracks an important thing to keep in consideration is the gait of the animal. The 4 main types of gaits are waddling, walking, bounding, and galloping. The students will have the opportunity to demonstrate these gaits by following the steps provided.

Waddling – Bears, badgers, porcupines, skunks, opossum, raccoon

- Waddlers move their legs on either side at the same time.

Walking – Deer, dogs, cats, wolves

- These animals move hind left leg and front right leg, then hind right leg and front left leg stepping into their own footprints.

Bounding – Weasels, minks

- Bounders move both front feet at once first and then move both back legs together landing just behind the front feet or almost in the front prints.

Galloping – Rabbits, hares, rodents

- It is similar to bounding except that here the hind feet land to either side or ahead of the front feet.

Track a Human (10 Minutes)

Divide the class into two groups, the leaders and the trackers. There should be an adult with each group. Let them know that the trackers will be following a trail left by the leaders. The leaders should travel down a series of trails for about 4 minutes, leaving signs and ending in a predetermined location. The signs that should be left are as follows and should be explained to the whole class before either group leaves.

☒ = group is nearby

× = wrong way

↶ = turn that way

‡ = go straight

↷ = turn that way

Animal Sign Hike (20 Minutes)

After the students have a good understanding of what to look for, let them know they are ready to put their detective skills to the test. Spend at least 20 minutes exploring outside on the trails looking for clues. Stress the importance of staying with the group and staying on the trails, unless otherwise instructed it is safe by an instructor. Keep a record of the different signs found. The instructor should do a little exploring before hand so he/she can show examples along the trail. Challenge the students to find at least 15 different types of clues as a group. Good areas to look for clues are the trail up to Sunset Hill and down past tube slide.

Conclusion (5 Minutes)

At the end of class, ask students if they noticed something today that they hadn't noticed before. Often times, it is not easy to find signs of life but that doesn't mean nothing lives there. Sometimes humans forget to look closely and study an area before they impact or change it. When this happens, humans can easily destroy habitats of other creatures without even realizing it until it's too late. Habitat destruction is the number one cause of endangered species. What can we do to prevent habitat destruction?