

On the Right Track

Environmental Education Lesson
EDWARDS CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

SUMMARY

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

USAGE

Grade levels: K – 6th. Winter is especially good for tracking

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 it for hiding.
- Identify the tracks of at least three common animals
- Improve their observation skills through using their five senses.

MATERIALS

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

INTRODUCTION

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 the yare walking or running. Animals are often closer than you think, you just need to know how and where to look for them.

WARM-UP ACTIVITIES

Name Game

You can start out with a name game. Ask each student to tell their name, the name of their favorite animal here at camp or around their home and what is special about that animal. This will get them thinking about animals and allow you to start learning the children's names.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

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 the students are going to try and match up the clue with the animal. Before class, place the “clues around the room.” (See appendix for list of clues, all items are in the lesson plan box) Give each student a picture of an animal and have them walk around the room looking at the clues and place their animal by the clue they think the animal could leave behind. Once the students have placed their picture, hold up each clue and see if the group agrees with the animal match. Discuss each clue briefly.

Animal Sign Hike (30 minutes)

After the students have a good understanding of the above clues, let them know they are ready to put their detective skills to the test. Spend at least 30 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.

Thicket Game (30 minutes)

Students will become the animals they have been looking for in this game about camouflage. A good area to play this game is the woods just past the end of the tube slide. Before explaining the rules, have the students talk about why we don't see a lot of animals even though we know that they are around. Some ideas maybe: better senses (can sense us before we know that they are there and move away from us), they maybe camouflaged, they may be staying very still to help them blend in with surroundings (movement is easy to spot), hiding in burrows, etc. Tell the students to keep these ideas in mind when playing the game. Explain rules of the thicket game. **See attached sheet for game rules.** Play a couple of rounds and discuss results.

Optional Activities

If there is extra time, the following activity can be added:

Listening Detectives

Find a nice opening and have the students take about five minutes to sit down and just listen, they can even sit back and close their eyes. No snoring please! Teach the kids how to make cups with their hands to funnel more sound into their ears and try listening that way. After five minutes talk about what they did or did not hear.

WRAP-UP

Review camouflage, which clues were found and discuss which animals probably live at camp based on the clues that you found. Tell the students that there are animal clues everywhere, even in their own backyard. Their assignment is now when they get home is to figure out who is living in their backyard or nearby park.

Appendix 1:

Animal Detective Cheat Sheet

Station 1: Owl Pellet (Owl)

Station 2: Chewed Jaw Bone (Chipmunk, they chew on bones for the calcium)

Station 3: Nest (Robin, robins make nests out of mud and grass)

Station 4: Fur piece (Coyote)

Station 5: Round Droppings (Rabbit, most herbivores have small round pellets for droppings)

Station 6: Part of Wasp Nest (wasp)

Station 7: Snake Skin (bullsnake, snakes shed their skin as they grow larger)

Station 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)

Station 9: Hooved Track (Deer)

Station 10: Chewed Wood (Beaver, beavers are the largest rodent and use the wood for both shelter and food. They only eat the soft outer bark, not the hard inner core)

Station 11: Quills (Porcupine, porcupines do not “shoot” their quills, but will release them into a predator when attacked)

Station 12: Cocoon in jar (butterfly)

Station 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)

Station 14: Bird Track (Great Blue Heron, very large, usually found on lake shores)

Station 15: Skull (Snapping Turtle, look at the beak and large head, snapping turtles are the largest turtle around here)