

Animal Autographs

Prints & Patterns

Pre-visit activity, all grades

Objective

Students will demonstrate that characteristics of both prints and patterns can help identify the track maker and what it was doing.

Background

Animal tracks can be analyzed in two ways. If individual prints are still clearly visible, shape and size can help determine which animal left them. Prints can be left by feet, hooves, paws, tails, bellies, or wings. With time and weather, prints can become obscured, making identification based on shape and size alone impossible. Animals leave their prints in predictable patterns or arrangements. For example, rabbits gallop or hop, leaving a completely different pattern of tracks than porcupines, who waddle.

Materials

- Fresh, untouched snowfield or sandy area and broom to sweep it clean
- Print Example Page (below)
- Prints and patterns from field guides












Procedure

1. Have children pair off with a partner. Assemble class near a patch of untrampled snow or sand. Use broom to clear away footprints, if necessary.

2. Have one partner of each pair close their eyes while the other makes a path in the snow/sand. Encourage children to start their path somewhere other than directly next to their partner.
3. Have print-makers return to their partners and show their shoe/boot soles so that the tracking partner can try to identify the correct tracks. Repeat steps with the partners switching roles.
4. Discuss the concept of individual print shapes and sizes. Show examples of different animal prints and let students guess which animal made them.
5. Gather students by snow/sand facing away with their eyes closed. Pick one student to walk, skip, jump, roll or hop across the clear area. The others then look at the pattern and try to guess what movement caused the pattern. Repeat with another student and pattern. Children may have fun making up their own movements.
6. Discuss how individual prints are not always clear due to factors like melting and wind. Explain that when you can no longer distinguish individual prints you can look at the pattern the prints left. Show examples of print patterns.

Print

Pattern

<p>Deer</p>	 <p>Actual Size: 2.5 inches long</p>	
<p>Fox</p>	 <p>Actual Size: 2 inches long</p>	
<p>Mountain Lion</p>	 <p>Actual Size: 3 inches long 3 inches wide</p>	
<p>Pheasant</p>	 <p>Actual Size: 2.5 inches long</p>	
<p>Rabbit</p>	 <p>Actual Size: front 1.5 inches long hind 3 inches long</p>	
<p>Raccoon</p>	 <p>Actual Size: front 2.25 inches long hind 3 inches long</p>	