

Animal Autographs

Tracking People in the Snow

Pre-visit activity, all grades

Objective

Students create "snowshoes" from recycled materials and track each other by identifying the different prints and patterns.

Background

See background for pre-visit activity, "Prints and Patterns". Conduct that activity first.

Materials

- Photographs, drawings, and/or casts of animal tracks (some examples were included with pre-visit activity, "Prints and Patterns").
- Recycled materials (plastic trays, milk containers, cardboard boxes, juice cans, yogurt cups, plastic bags, etc.) Children can bring these from home but have a back-up supply to fill out your collection.
- String, glue, fasteners, scissors, staplers, etc.
- Disposable cameras, one for each group (optional)
- Whistle or bell (optional)

Preparation

Collect materials ahead of time.

Procedure

1. Distribute photographs and drawings of various animal tracks, there are many great tracking books from which you can copy track examples. Select tracks students can readily recognize and distinguish from each other. Older children may enjoy researching their own examples of tracks and patterns using library books, magazines, computer resources and even their pet's feet. Discuss the tracks animals leave. Try to include rabbit, mice, fox, and deer tracks as these will possibly be found during your visit to the Nature Center. If casts of animal tracks are available, allow the class to examine them.
2. Announce to the class they are about to create special snowshoe-type feet from recycled materials. Each student needs to create a cover for each foot that will leave an unusual print for the trackers (other students) to follow. Each student will have a chance to act as the animal, and a few chances to act as a tracker. The designs do not have to be the same for both feet.
3. Allow enough time for the students to create their tracking feet, possibly a day or two before the tracking event. Younger students will need assistance.
4. Divide the class into groups of four or five students who will be able to work together well. Each student will take a turn at being the animal for their group while the others (the trackers) attempt to track them. An optional fun activity could have the trackers snapping a photograph of the animal when they find him/her.
5. Set the ground rules for the activity:
 - Define the area students can use. The larger the better, but make sure you have the ability to call them all in when necessary. A whistle or bell can be a great attention getter to call the groups back in. All students will probably be more comfortable conducting this activity in an area they are familiar with.
 - Discuss safety factors for the site, making sure they do not cross busy streets or deep ravines and they stay away from all water/ice.
 - Allow the animal from each group a two-minute head start before the rest of the group begins pursuit.

This is an activity of finesse. Once the trackers have located the animal, they may not run away and continue to hide. If disposable cameras are used, the moment of capture may be caught on film as the animal gracefully allows his/her picture to be taken.

Animals should try to be as tricky as possible. Print-making snowshoes can be slipped off and worn backwards. Hopping is allowed as is swinging from low branches and traveling through areas with other tracks already present. But one found, they should acknowledge the fact so the next animals can have their turn.

Set a time limit for each round so each student gets a chance to be the animal. When time is up for each round, signal the groups to return to a central point, whether they found their quarry or not. Should a group hopelessly lose their quarry, they should still return to the central point, as should the uncaptured animal.

Allow time for discussion of the activity. Ask, "Which animals were the easiest to track? What tricks did some of them use? Did they move in any special ways to avoid their "predators"? If you had a chance to redesign the snowshoes, what changes would you make? What were the most successful stalking techniques?"