

Animal Autographs

What Do We Leave Behind?

Post-visit activity, all grades

Adapted from 175 Amazing Nature Experiments, Harlow and Morgan

Objective

Students will investigate footprints and create a replica of their own tracks.

Materials

- Large container of damp sand
- 2" wide strips of thin cardboard
- Tape and/or stapler
- Plaster of Paris
- Paints

Background

Footprints left in snow often disappear quickly, but many creatures leave behind their signatures or tracks in mud and sand. Tracks can help you identify the animals living in an area and can sometimes tell you a story about what these animals do each day.

Procedure

1. Depending on the age of students, either cut the cardboard strips ahead of time or have the students cut them.

2. Bend strips into a circle and tape or staple them together so they fit around a child's footprint. Have each child write their name on the strip.
3. Have each student take off their shoes and socks and make an impression with their bare foot in the damp sand (one person at a time). Push the cardboard circle into the sand leaving a margin around the print.
4. Pour the creamy Plaster of Paris into the circle. It works best if you make up fresh plaster for each separate print or have a container of sand large enough to fit several students at a time.
5. When the plaster is hard to the touch remove it and take away the cardboard circle. Allow the cast to dry completely, then have the students paint the prints.

Extensions

Explain to students they can do the same thing with animal prints. Take a walk in an area near your school where you have seen animal tracks. Make a plaster of Paris replica of the tracks you find. Have the students attempt to identify the tracks.

Have a parent bring a friendly pet cat or dog to school and make replicas of that animal's prints. If it is possible to bring both a cat and dog, compare the differences between the two prints. This can be done outside if animals are not allowed in your school.