



Animal Signs - Activity 1: Brainstorming

There aren't always a ton of animals to be seen around in winter. This can lead to the misconception that there aren't a lot of animals living around us! This activity is meant to get students reflecting on what they've seen around. They are encouraged to use this information to make a hypothesis for what animals live around them. After Activity 2, this activity can be revisited to challenge the list of animals the students came up with initially. This encourages students to adjust conclusions when presented with new data.

Goals

- Familiarize yourself with your local green space and its inhabitants
- Understand that there is a lot more wildlife around than it initially looks like

Material

- n/a

Activity

Take a few moments with your class and brainstorm what animals live in your local green space and how they know. This can be done verbally or on a whiteboard (virtual or otherwise) and would be most effective prior to students receiving the biodiversity sheets. Having students brainstorm together as a group helps them to build a more comprehensive list but you'll find that students will likely have a harder time coming up with new answers the further along you are with the activity- this is to be expected! Most likely, common animals to be seen (ex. Squirrels, rabbits, etc.) will be the first to be listed. "Because I saw one there" is also going to be a common answer to why they know an animal lives somewhere. This doesn't mean that it's wrong! Once students start having a harder time coming up with new answers, start giving them prompts to think about:

- Most animals are hard to see because they don't want to be seen-the more easily seen they are, the more easily a predator can catch them! Even if you don't see an animal, how can we know it's been around?
- What animals would you expect in the habitat?
- Do all animals have fur? Many students think that the word "animal" actually just means "mammal", but not all animals are mammals. Point out that birds, insects, reptiles, and amphibians are also animals, and see if students can list any common to the area.

Once you've come up with a decent list with your class, ask the students to keep this list in mind as you continue with the lesson. Activity 2 is a nice follow-up activity for this.

If your class has gone on to complete Activity 2, revisit your brainstorming afterwards. Can you add more animals to your list? It is likely that your list will grow as your class gets an idea of different subtle

animal signs to look for. This is wonderful for reinforcing the idea that there's lots more animal activity around than we usually think of! Winter is not as dead a season as everyone thinks!

It can also be fun to keep adding to the list as the semester goes on. This encourages students to always keep an eye out for different animals signs out in nature and gives them an outlet to share exciting finds!

