



Animal Signs - Activity 2: Who's living here?

The winters in Canada are tough to survive and sometimes, we don't really see many animals out and about in the cold. This can make winter seem like a pretty dead season but don't be fooled-there is still a ton of wildlife out there! We just need to take a closer look at the clues that they leave behind. This activity is meant to get kids thinking critically about how we can tell if an animal lives in a habitat, even if we can't see them. It allows students to use their investigative skills and find different clues in a habitat as well as familiarize themselves with their local green spaces.

Goals

- Understand that animals are around even if we can't see them
- Identify some animal signs
- Familiarize yourself with your local green space and its inhabitants

Materials

- Animal Signs Biodiversity Sheet
- Access to a green space

Activity

Emphasize to students that animals are around even if we can't see them! The Arboretum Animal Signs Biodiversity Sheet has a quick reference list of many common clues that these animals can leave behind. For this activity, students will go to a local green space and go on a scavenger hunt for animal signs using the Biodiversity Sheet. How many from the sheet can they find?

The scale of the activity can be up to you (as small as a single log or as big as a whole park) but be sure to set boundaries for students for their search. Keep in mind that the scale of the search will also impact how long this activity will take- a smaller area to search will take less time for students to cover while a larger area may keep students busy for a whole class. With a larger area, which will allow for easier physical distancing in bigger groups, it may also be helpful to set a time limit. At home learners can also conduct this activity in their backyards.

If students have trouble finding signs, encourage them to imagine where an animal might go to guess where to search for signs. If we want to find porcupine signs, should we be checking in the woods or by the field? Where would be a good protected spot for a wasp to build a nest? What could hide in the cracks of that tree bark?

At a wrap-up for the activity, have students share what different signs they found. Some students may have found different things than their peers and seeing/hearing about all the signs found will help them understand the diversity of wildlife that are around despite not being seen. Remember that not everything they find will be on the sheet. For example, if there is fresh snow, there may be many animal tracks to look at and they are great animal signs.

Safety Note - The Scoop on Scat:

The biodiversity sheet includes an owl pellet. Since some animal feces (a.k.a scat) can look like owl pellets, be sure to tell the students they are not allowed to pick up anything that looks like an owl pellet but to point it out to you instead. Some animal scat contains parasites and germs that are not good for humans, so look but don't touch.

"GROSS!" This is a natural reaction to finding animal poop...but everybody poops! Animal scat can be a useful animal sign for identifying what animal has been around.

Resources:

Lynch, Wayne. *The Scoop on Poop*. Fifth House Publishers, 2002.

"The Scat Rap". Andy Bennet, Mary Keebler, Rodd Pemble, Doug Elliot, Billy Jonas, 1988. National Storytelling Network, storynet.org/scat-rap/.

