

“Critters ‘R Us” or “Crime Scene Critters”

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Estimated Sessions: Parts of two 45-minute periods

Grade levels: All

Purpose: To have students identify various nocturnal animals in their local area.

Geography Standards Addressed:

Indiana Social Studies Academic Standards: World Geography

WG.2.2: Categorize characteristics of places in terms of whether they are physical (natural) or cultural (human). Know and apply the sub-categories of physical and cultural characteristics when describing any given place.

WG.3.2: Categorize elements of the natural environment as belonging to one of the four components of Earth’s physical systems: atmosphere, lithosphere, biosphere, or hydrosphere.

WG.3.5: Describe the world patterns of natural vegetation and biodiversity and their relations to world climate patterns.

WG.5.10: Assess how people's perceptions of their relationship to natural phenomena have changed over time and analyze how these changing perceptions are reflected in human activity and land use. (History; Individuals, Society, and Culture)

WG.6.12: Develop policies that are designed to guide the use and management of Earth's resources and that reflect multiple points of view. (Civic and Government; Economics)

Objective:

Upon completion of this activity students will be able to predict, identify, analyze, and categorize the various nocturnal animals found in their immediate area.

Background:

Many years ago I found this activity (original author unknown) and have adapted it to urban and suburban environments. Depending on the size of the class and the energy of the teacher, this activity can be easily replicated for different areas around the school or a park. Make sure you have permission from property owners or managers before you begin.

Materials Required: (for one 3x3 "crime scene")

- One bag of play sand (40 lbs.)
- One meter stick or yardstick
- Four 3 foot long wooden or plastic stakes
- Yellow "crime scene" tape (I found a huge roll at Lowe's)
- Various baits or attractants, such as: Hershey's kisses, fruit, vegetables, etc . . .
- At least one page of animal tracks or go to:<http://www.entm.purdue.edu/wildlife/TRACKS.htm>
- Or purchase one of many field guides and make your own.
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- Animal Tracks of Indiana by Tamara Eder, 2001, Lone Pine Publishing, \$6.99
- A rake or 2-foot section of 2x4 to smooth sand
- Hammer

Procedures:

Prior to taking students to the “crime scene” introduce the activity by brainstorming the various types of animals they might find that live around their school. Have them look online or pass out a one-page teacher created animal tracks worksheet and have them identify which animals they might see in their schoolyard. Once they have created a list of animals ask the students what types of food might attract the animals. Make a list of those “baits.” Describe to the students the “crime scene” activity and ask their input on the types of baits that might attract the most diverse group of animals. I suggest creating at least three separate crime scenes located around the school. There should be only one type of bait in each one. (For example: one scene might have lettuce; another Hershey’s kisses; and the final one might contain hamburger.)

The evening before you will conduct this activity pick an area out of pedestrian traffic near your school and stake out an area roughly 3 feet by 3 feet. Place sand inside the staked area and smooth with the rake or board. Once the sand is smooth place 5-6 “baits” in the sand. Wrap the yellow crime scene tape around the top of each stake.

The next day put students into groups of 4 and arm them with a calculator, a writing utensil, and a animal track worksheet (teacher created).

Have the group quietly approach the crime scene from different sides. I have my students “low crawl” up to the yellow tape without going over it. Without touching the tracks have them look over the sandy area for animal tracks and record what they find. After a few minutes have them switch sides. Encourage them to share information. Have them count the number of tracks and then divide by 4 to determine the number of animals that visited the site. (Although, it may be only one animal!) Students should rotate through all crime scenes until they have investigated them all.

Assessment: Students should be able to describe in writing in report form the number of animals, the types discovered, and the favorite baits.

Adaptations/Extensions: Before they investigate the crime scenes, have the students predict which bait will attract the most traffic. Have them write their reasoning.