



Introduction to Animal Tracks Lesson Plan

Grades: 2-6

Time: 45-90 minutes

NGSS Connections:

2-LS2-2. The shape and stability of structures of natural and designed objects are related to their function(s).

3-LS3-1 Analyze and interpret data to provide evidence that plants and animals have traits inherited from parents and that variation of these traits exists in a group of similar organisms.

4-LS1-1 Construct an argument that plants and animals have internal and external structures that function to support survival, growth, behavior and reproduction.

MS-LS2-2 Construct an explanation that predicts patterns of interactions among organisms across multiple ecosystems.

Source: Animal Tracks Literacy Project, <http://www.animaltracksbysteve.com/>. A complete lesson plan with background information and materials is available for loan through the Estuary Partnership.

Essential Question: What story is told by the tracks animals leave behind?

Materials:

- 24 track stencils (6 different species)
- Animal Tracks Literacy Project overhead
- Mystery Track Data Sheet
- Key to Mystery Tracks and a Practice Page
- 14 Animal Tracks of Washington and Oregon field guides (by request)
- 20 laminated life size tracks (by request)
- Rulers (not included)

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will be able to identify and describe individual parts of a track.
2. Students will be able to correctly measure length and width of a track.
3. Students will be able to draw tracks and use a dichotomous key to identify tracks.

Vocabulary: track, heel pad, webbing, length, width

Track Identification (key for teacher): A: raccoon, B: red fox, C: coyote, D: house cat; E: river otter, F: mallard

Introduction (5-15 minutes):

- Show “Animal Tracks Literacy Project” overhead and have students make observations: How many different tracks do you see? Can you tell if one animal was here before another? Do you recognize any of the animals? Can you tell if any of the animals changed their behavior?

- Show “Parts of track” overhead.

Toes

Pad-like: Round or oval shape. Not connected to the heel pad.

Finger-like: Long and narrow. Connected to the heel pad.

Webbing: Line connecting toes near their tips.

Hoof-Like: Toes numbering one or two only. There is no heel pad.

Heel

Simple: One heel pad (beaver).

Complex: More than one heel pad (bear front foot).

Claws

Present: Claw marks are visible.

Absent: Claw marks are not visible.

- Can discuss adaptations of cats and dogs. Dogs always have claws out for running and traction. Cats rely on stealth and sharp claws to attack prey.
- Advanced option: Illustrate how to measure a track. Have students practice measuring one of the laminated life size tracks.

Activity (30-35 minutes):

1. Distribute a practice page worksheet to each student.
2. Using colored pencils or markers, students color in the different parts of the track.
3. Pass out stencils and Mystery Track data sheet.
4. Have students trace the track onto their worksheet and answer the questions about the track.
5. After students completed 4 tracks, explain how to use the Mystery Tracks Key using an example.
6. Students identify all 4 tracks using the key.

Wrap-up (5 minutes): Identify the Mystery Tracks.

Extension Ideas:

- Explore schoolyard or nearby park and look for tracks!
- Borrow additional [tracking supplies](#) from the Estuary Partnership.
- Recreate tracks on the sidewalk with chalk on school grounds (students or teacher can draw tracks). Students can practice identifying and measuring.
- Students research animals in animal tracking field guides.
- Students write a creative story about tracks found in a picture or on school grounds.