

International Snow Leopard Trust

Prey and Predator: A lesson in stealth

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Goal: For students to learn in a participatory activity about the importance of sight and hearing senses for both prey and predator to survive.

Overview: This activity gives students the opportunity to experience the prey-predator relationship. It makes salient some of the skills a predator must practice in order to catch prey and the skills necessary for prey to elude predators. This experiment requires few materials and allows all students the opportunity to observe and make statements regarding prey/predatory relationships.

Grade Level: 1-7

Group size: 25-30 students, whole group activity

Time: 40-45 minutes including discussion

Materials: Two blindfolds and a large open space to work in.

Subjects: science; communications; drama

Key words: prey; predator

Objectives:

Knowledge:

Students will: Understand the prey/predator relationship is a complex one and have a greater appreciation of the finely developed skills and senses needed by both prey and predator

Skills:

Students will: Be able to verbalize some of the skills necessary to be a successful predator and to avoid predation

Values:

Students will: Understand that the prey/predator relationship is a complex one that deserves to be researched and recognized; that the prey/predator relationships are an important component of a balanced ecosystem

Outline:

1. The teacher introduces the prey/predator relationship by asking students what they know about this important relationship. Students may wish to make a list of predators and their prey that they know of.
2. The teacher asks students what skills they think a predator might need to be successful in a hunt and what skills a prey may need to avoid capture. Elicit how students think prey avoids capture and how predators avoid being seen/heard.
3. After engaging prior knowledge the teacher will introduce the activity. Two students will be selected for the activity while the remainder of the class should sit on the floor in a circle around these two students.
4. The two students in the center are blindfolded. One student is the “prey” the other the “predator.” The “predator” should try to pursue the “prey” while the “prey” eludes the predator. This is sort of a version of tag but with blindfolds.
5. The audiences’ job is to observe. Students should be told that in order for the activity to be successful there is a need for quiet. The “prey” and “predator” should use their senses to elude and pursue.
6. Once the prey has been tagged the two students might change places and the activity resume.
7. Try different variations with different pairs: blindfold the prey, but not the predator and vice versa. Should time permit, more students may participate by changing places with the original two students.
8. Following the activity the teacher should question students about their observations as to what senses the predator relied upon to capture prey: what were some of the things both the prey and the predator has to do to be successful.

Introduction (5 minutes)

The teacher informs students they will be doing an activity that explores the prey/predator relationship.

In this activity we will be looking at the prey/predator relationship. What do I mean by prey (an animal is pursued and eaten by something else) and predator (an animal that pursues another animal for food)? Can you give me examples of a predator and its prey? (Wolf-caribou, hares, moose).

Why is it important to have both prey and predator? (Extremely important relationship that ensures the ecosystem remains in balance.) What might happen if there were too much prey and not enough predators or vice versa? (Overgrazing, starvation of prey animals and predators.) Today we are going to experience this relationship. While we do this activity try to understand what skills are needed to be a successful predator and those needed to avoid becoming prey.

Experiment (10 minutes per two students)

Ask for two volunteers to act as prey and predator. The rest of the class should sit in a large circle with the two volunteers walking on hands and legs in the center. The rules should be explained and then the two volunteers should be blindfolded and on their hands and knees in the center.

One student is the prey the other is the predator. In this activity we will all need to be quiet so that we can observe and our two volunteers can use their remaining senses to try to recreate the prey/predator relationship for us. In this activity our prey will try to elude the predator. The predator will tag the prey to “capture” it when close enough. Please observe the prey and predator closely during this activity so that later we can talk about how each had to behave in order to be successful.

The prey and predator may begin. Remember-all's quiet.

Discussion of Activity (15 minutes)

Let's talk about some of the things you noticed about what the prey had to do to elude the predator and what the predator had to do to capture its prey. What senses did each rely heavily upon? (Hearing) What did the predator listen for? (Sound of movement, vocalization.) [Prey may have also tried to “feel” the movement of air as the prey passed.] What did the prey have to do to avoid capture? (Be as quiet as possible, always be on alert.) What did the predator have to do? (Move quietly, listen intently, and use strategy.) How might an ibex move and behave as a prey species? How do you think snow leopards behave as a predator? As well as stealth and alertness, what other tools do you think prey uses to avoid capture (staying in “escape terrain” = types of habitat where predators find it difficult to move around – cliffs – or where they are well camouflaged).

Closure (5 minutes)

The prey/predator relationship is extremely important for keeping balance in an ecosystem. But being a successful predator or being prey capable of eluding capture takes special skills-as we've experienced today. As we move through the rest of this unit keep in mind how an animals' role in the ecosystem influences its behavior. You might also ask yourself, “How successful might I be if I lived in the wilds? What would I need to do in order to survive?”

Assessment:

Students will be able to define prey and predator and describe the importance of this relationship to ecosystem balance. They will also be able to describe the reliance on certain senses an animal has when engaging in this relationship.