THE THICKET GAME

A game of camouflage and adaptation

Overview – Students play a modified version of "hide and seek" representing predators and prey.

Grades level – K-6

Learning Station – This activity can be done anywhere there are places for "prey" to hide. The aspen trees near the shelter make a good location. You can also play several rounds in different forest types and compare where it was easier or more difficult to hide or find prey.

Materials

- Blindfolds, however, you can get by without these by just having the "prey" close their eyes.
- Camouflage and blaze orange/bright color caps, and shirts
- Camouflage poster

Activity

Begin the activity by using the "camouflage poster". Ask the students: Who stands out in the picture of the group of people; can they find the animals in the other pictures; why do hunters wear blaze orange clothing, etc.

Tell the students they will be playing a "hide and seek", predator/prey game. The object of the game is to get as close to the predator (person who is "it") without being seen or heard.

Follow the directions on the attached handout, The Thicket Game (from Project Wild)

Extensions/Assessment

- Conduct the activity in several areas with different cover types and compare the results.
- Assign prey to wear the camouflage or blaze orange clothing and discuss how this affects their ability to hide.
- Ask students for examples of animals and/or plants that show camouflage in our local school forest area.
- How do prey animals protect themselves if there is no place to hide, such as in a prairie or desert habitat? How are the predators adapted differently in these habitats? Play the game "Muskox Maneuvers" to demonstrate this concept.

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OBJECTIVES

Students will: 1) define adaptation in animals; and 2) generalize that all animals are adapted to survive.

METHOD

Students become "predator" and "prey" in a version of "hide and seek."

BACKGROUND

NOTE: See "Seeing is Believing" and "Surprise Terrarium" for other elementary-age adaptation activities.

Animals are adapted to their environment in order to survive. Animals may be adapted to changes in their habitats. For example, snowshoe rabbits have a white winter coat to blend with a snowy environment and a tan summer coat to blend with summer ground and vegetation colors. Chameleons change color to blend with their surroundings. The walking-stick insect can look like a twig or stick. Fawns have spotted hair that resembles dappled light on the forest floor.

The major purpose of this activity is for students to understand the importance of adaptation to animals.

MATERIALS

blindfolds; outdoor area like a thicket or other vegetated area free of poisonous plants and other hazards where students can safely hide

Age: Grades K-6
Subjects: Science, Physical Education, Language Arts
Skills: Analysis, application, description, discussion, generalization, kinesthetic concept development, observation, psychomotor development
Duration: 30 minutes
Group Size: minimum of five students
Setting: outdoors
Conceptual Framework Reference: III.D., III.D.1., III.D.2.
Key Vocabulary: adaptation, predator, prey
Appendices: Outdoors, Field Ethics, Simulations

PROCEDURE

1. Take the class to a "thicket."
2. Blindfold one student who will be the "predator." The predator slowly counts to 20 while the other students or "prey" hide. Hiding students must be able to see some part of the predator at all times.
3. After counting, the predator removes the blindfold and looks for prey. The predator can turn around, squat and stand on tip-toe but not walk or change location. The predator should see how many students he or she can find, identify them out loud and describe where they are. When identified, the prey come to the predator's location and wait until the next round to become predators but do not tell the original predator where anyone else is hiding.
4. When the original predator cannot see any more students, a new round starts. All of the predators put on blindfolds. Predators should be in close proximity to each other. Each predator has the same motion restrictions that the original predator had. The original predator again counts aloud to 20. All the remaining prey must move at least ten feet closer to the predators. Those remaining prey still try to remain hidden. All the predators remove their blindfolds and take turns naming students they can see.
5. Play as many rounds as necessary until only one or two students are left hidden. At that time, have the remaining students stand up and identify themselves. It may be surprising how close the prey got to the predators without being detected. Both the ability to remain undetected and to detect others are examples of successful adaptations. Introduce the term "adaptation."
6. Do the activity one or two more times.
7. Discuss what made predators and prey successful. Were they quiet, clever, camouflaged, or good listeners? Ask students to identify animals that are adapted with similar characteristics to survive.

8. Ask the students how they could change to be more successful predators and prey. Some ideas that may come out are: changing color (clothes); wearing clothing that doesn't stick to plants; being smaller; climbing a tree. Ask the students if animals can make any similar kinds of changes.
9. Talk about differences between physical and behavioral changes. Have the students identify which survival and adaptations related to predators and prey are behavioral, which are physical and which involve both. Explain that physical and behavioral adaptations take time.
10. Ask students to summarize what they have learned. See if students can think of other examples of animal adaptations. Generalize that all animals are adapted to survive.

AQUATIC EXTENSIONS

1. It is not just animals on land that are adapted for survival in a variety of ways! Imagine an underwater thicket. What would be the same, if anything, about predator and prey relationships in an underwater thicket? What would be different, if anything? Draw two different underwater thickets—one in a pond and one in an ocean. Include pictures of fish and other aquatic life that are hardly visible because of adaptations that make them hard to see and pictures of others that are easy to see.
2. Identify predators and prey in two or more aquatic environments.

EVALUATION

1. Describe the importance of adaptation to animals. Give at least two examples of animal adaptation.
2. Create a play or skit that shows how both predators and prey are adapted to survive.