



NATURE DETECTIVES GRADES 1-3

Put on your thinking cap and head outside to solve the mysteries of nature. Use your nature detective skills to find out who has been visiting Riverside's Knowledge Path.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

- Take on the role of a nature detective. Look for evidence left behind and make discoveries about animals and other species that live at the Riverside's Knowledge Path in winter.
- Through an outdoor field investigation, explore and practice being a naturalist.

CURRICULUM OUTCOMES:

- Provide students with the opportunity to use their sense of wonder to explore the world around them.
- Students are Observing, questioning, investigating, reflecting, interpreting data, enhancing curiosity, socializing in an outdoor setting.

MATERIALS

- Nature journal or paper
- Pencil
- Clipboards
- Online videos on nature detectives (optional)
- Book on Nature detectives (optional)

This is an individual or group outdoor/indoor activity, it can be done in outdoor spaces of the school, home, backyard, or nearby parks/trails

WHAT TO DO:

Overview

- Animals and plants adapt accordingly for the different season. Animals respond in generally three ways:
 1. leaving the area in fall (migration)
 2. Hibernating
 3. Staying active

Introduction

- Teach students how to become nature detectives. This can be done by [reading](#) books related to the tracking animals and birds in snow, showing pictures or [videos online](#), or simply by a verbal presentation.
- Later, brainstorm with the class about what a detective does. (Solves mysteries using clues). What does a nature detective do?
 - A nature detective looks for clues left behind by animals or other species).
 - What kind of clues do animals leave behind? (Tracks, scat, homes, etc.)
- Take the class outside to Riverside's Knowledge Path (or another local outdoor environment) and tell them that they are nature detectives and their job is to look for evidence left behind by animals or other species.
- Hand out clipboards with paper and pencil to draw/ write/sketch (age-appropriate) their findings. Educators can take note of their class predictions. Inquire about what the class can find out about animals in snow? An educator can discuss field rules with the class.
- Outdoors in fresh snow, make a circle with the children and walk around inside the circle while they stay put.
 - How many footprints are for each complete set of tracks? (two)
 - Are the tracks close together or far apart? (close)
 - Run in the circle - how do the tracks change? (far apart)
 - Play Follow the Leader! Each child must try their best to step in the footprints in front of them. Vary the steps for walking, long strides, tiptoe, hopping, and running.
 - Reflect together: what did they discover? How might they apply their discoveries to animal tracks?
- On the path, make a new set of footprints. Challenge them to watch and walk next to the footprints without stepping on them. Check with the last person in line - did they see your footprints?
- Now, search for evidence left behind by animals. (Example- fur, scat, tracks etc. Let the class record their observations. Ask students prompting questions:

- Do you think animals visited this place?
- Can you find any clues?
- Who left the clues behind?
- Can you decide which way they were going?
- Do you think it's an old clue or a fresh one?
- What do you think the animal doing right now? (Hiding, sleeping, hunting, eating)
- Return to the classroom and allow each individual/group a chance to share what they found?

ASSESSMENT:

- The educator can evaluate learners on their attention to detail by explaining the tracks and its nearby environment.
- Evaluate on how the learners draw/write/explain their experience and demonstrate the concept of adaptations, ecosystem.

EXTENSIONS:

- Encourage students to bring their parents/guardians to the Riverside's Knowledge Path on the weekend. Students can find clues with their parents/guardians to continue being nature detectives.
- Students could also examine their pet's feet at home (carefully, with an adult's help). Do they have claws? Pads? How many? Can they walk or hop like their pet?

"Snow is the great revealer. It cannot keep a secret. All through the woods around us, it was filled with the gossip of the night."

-- Edwin Way Teale, *Wandering Through Winter*

CREDIT/REFERENCES:

This activity has been modified from the Prairie Wetlands Learning Centre [Nature Detectives activity](#).