

INDOORS, OUTDOORS * GRADES 4-6 * SPRING * PROJECT



Slimy Characters on Trial

DESCRIPTION

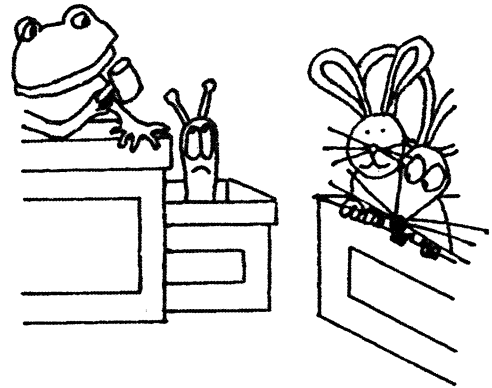
After determining the numbers and locations of a certain pest in the garden, students hold a trial to decide if the pest is in fact guilty of eating their plants.

OBJECTIVE

To identify pests and pest damage.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

This activity provides students with an excellent opportunity to use careful observation and evidence collection to support a hypothesis. Sometimes an animal that is considered to be a pest is just resting in the hole made by another pest. We recommend that the class choose an easy-to-identify pest from your garden.



CLASS DISCUSSION

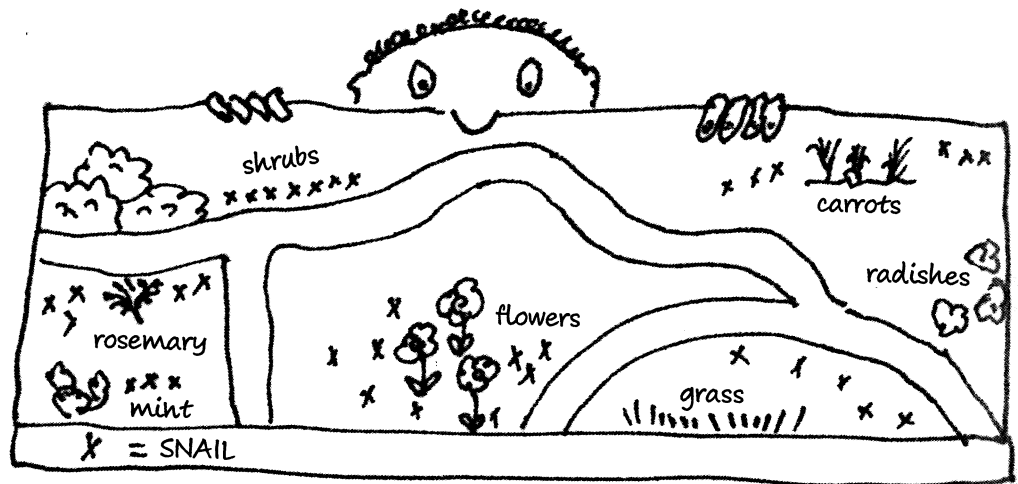
We share our garden with lots of critters. Some we see and some we don't. They can live underground, on the ground, in the plants, or in the air. Crawling, climbing, flying, jumping, slithering – they are always moving and searching for food. Who lives in our garden? Where do they go for food? Let's be detectives and find out. What do detectives do? (*collect evidence*)

First, we will select an animal we think is a major pest in our garden. It needs to be one we can easily find. We will divide into teams. Some of the teams will look for evidence of damage by the suspected pest; other teams will look for evidence of innocence. Then we will present the evidence at a trial.

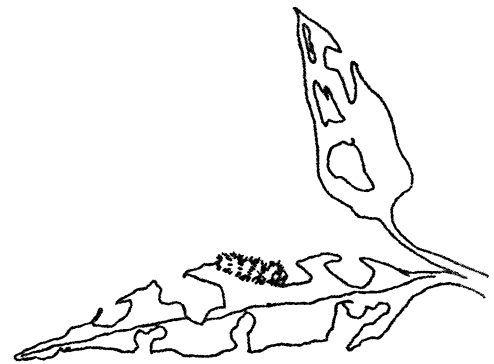
ACTION

1. Appoint a judge, a prosecutor against the pest, and a defense lawyer for the pest. Divide the rest of the class into two teams, one team to work with each attorney.
2. Assist the judge in developing the rules for collecting the evidence and in determining when the trial will start.
3. Advise the attorneys to meet with their groups and to divide them into teams of three to go into the garden with pencil and paper and find as many pests as they can. Look into overgrown places and on and around the crop plants, especially between leaves where they like to hide.

4. Each team should count and record how many pests there are on any plant and shrub, and then make a map.



5. Does the pest seem to have a favorite hiding place or favorite food? How do you know they were eating it? What signs can you find?
6. The prosecutor's team should gather and record any evidence of damage, such as damaged leaves, descriptions of evidence leading to damaged plants, the number of pests on plants nearby, and so on.
7. The defense attorney's teams should gather evidence indicating that the damage was caused by pests other than their clients. (Which ones? Slugs? Beetles? How can you prove it?) They should look to discover other pests that feed on leaves and describe and map them.
8. Now return to the classroom and hold a mock trial. Everyone except the attorneys and judge sits as jury. Remind the jurors to be impartial. The prosecutor should present the evidence to convict the pests of plant eating, and the defense attorney must try to prove their innocence by presenting evidence that the damage could have been done by other insects. Attorneys may call on members of their teams as witnesses. The defense attorney could suggest that the simple presence of the pests near the scene of the crime does not prove their guilt.
9. Now let the jury decide – remember, innocent until proven guilty! If guilty, the judge must decide the sentence.



WRAP UP

Is it always easy to tell what pest has been eating a plant? Why or why not? Did your pest seem to have a favorite food in the garden? Would it die if you didn't grow that crop anymore? Are all insects pests?

