

Animal Antics

Students observe and mime animal behavior. This model activity can be repeated with each new animal students explore.



Outcome

Students model animal behaviors.

For the Teacher

Over generations animals develop traits and characteristics that allow them to survive the particular conditions of an environment. This takes place through natural selection. Thus animals that live in the soil will move, see and hear differently than those that live on a plant leaf.

Students can observe these behaviors and compare them in a number of ways. Taking the time to encourage careful observation techniques will enhance the student's learning while ensuring the safety of the animals.

Always start by observing with eyes and not hands! With hands in their lap, students will be able to focus on the animal rather than what they can do to the animal. By sharing their observations with a partner or a small group, they will be able to stay focused longer. You can make a game of it by encouraging each student to add a new observation and to see how many times they can go around the circle.

Next students may want to set a prop in front of the animal to see how it responds. Each observation will give the students more information. As they continue, stimulate them to develop their own questions about the animal. Give them opportunities to design their own simple (and safe) way to investigate their questions.



Indoor



Time

20 minutes, or until students lose interest

Related Subject

Drama

Process Skills

Observing

Communicating



Materials

For the Class:

(6 or 8 students at a time)

- 10–12 individuals of the animal to be investigated
- 3–4 pencils
- 3–4 magnifying lenses
- 3–4 clear plastic cups
- 5–10 leaves
- 1 stem about 6 inches long
- 1 marking pen
- the Garden Animals List

Teacher to Teacher

As the children watched their animals, they discovered tiny details such as a missing antenna. One child noticed how her sow bug moved around, bumping into the side of his container. Another child noticed how his sow bug crawled over other sow bugs and how they huddled together like a football team. From time to time, I had to remind the students to keep their hands on their laps and to share something new they had discovered about their animal with their partner. For kindergartners this was a real challenge, because they were so eager to hold them like they would a house pet.

—Cassandra Thompson, Oakmont Elementary School, Columbus, OH

Preparation

1. If possible, take students to the garden to collect the animals. For more on finding and caring for the critters, see information on specific animals starting on p. 211.
2. Mark off a section on the Garden Animals List for the specific animal you are studying.
3. Place 2 animals in each of the cups.
4. Teach in teacher-directed groups of 6 or 8 students.



Getting Started

Show students the animal and ask for their ideas about its behavior.

What do you know about this animal? What kinds of things does it do? How do you know? How could we learn more about what it does? Tell students that after they watch how the animals behave, they will silently act out, or mime, what they do.



Action

1. If you have created a temporary home for the animal, give students a chance to observe how they act in their habitat. Pass out magnifying lenses for close-up views of the critter.
2. Pair up students. Give each pair a cup with animals.
3. Ask students to place their hands on their laps as they watch the animals, so they can see what animals do when left alone.
4. As students watch the animals, encourage them to share observations with each other. **What is the animal doing that you could do?**
5. Demonstrate how to tickle the animals gently with a pencil to encourage movement.
6. Discuss what the animals do when they are turned on their backs or when they are close to one another.
7. Give each student pair a leaf and stem, and let them experiment with the animal's behavior.
8. Ask each pair to select one behavior of the animal that they want to mimic.

9. Ask pairs one at a time to mimic the animal. Challenge them to act out different behaviors.

10. After everyone has had a chance to perform, see if anyone can watch the animal and discover something new to do.



Assessment

Challenge students to compare the behavior of the animals and their classmates.

Do animals act like people? How? Do they act differently from people? How?

Digging Deeper

- Let students experiment with flashlights to discover how their animal behaves around bright light. Be sure to have a dark place for the animals to take refuge.

- Take students on a visit to the garden to look for their animal. Encourage them to watch the animals without touching them. Ask students if the places where they found the animal had anything in common.

- Make a simple maze, and let the students experiment to see if the animal can be enticed through the maze in search of food, water, or a dark place to hide.

- Ask students for suggestions on how to find out if their animal likes dry or moist places. Here is one way: put some dry cotton or shredded paper towels along one side of an empty plastic tub and moist cotton or towels along the other side. Put the animals in the middle of the tub, and watch what they do.

Teacher Reflections

- Did pairs mimic different behaviors, or were all the performances the same?

- Did students notice new aspect of the animal's behavior after the first set of performances?

In the Garden

Take your students to the garden to see if any plants are losing their leaves because of insects or other causes. If they discover that bugs are chewing on the plants, experiment with ways to protect the leaves. Try making collars from plastic cups or bottles to put around seedlings, and hand-picking insects or making earwig and slug traps. See Gardening Know-How for the '90s, pp. 47, 50, 92-8, 122-24, 131, 132, 134, 142, 149, for more information on insect control.

