



Preschool Pelts

30 min. Preschool Winter Adaptations LP

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This 30 min. hands-on lesson plan is aimed to introduce preschool aged children to a variety of animal pelts, encouraging them to think about how Wyoming wildlife survive harsh winters.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will get to explore a variety of animal pelts.
2. Students will be introduced to winter survival adaptations of wildlife.
3. Students will see examples of animal tracks and get excited about seeing tracks in the snow.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. A large assortment of animal pelts/parts (coyote, deer, fox, weasel, bear, beaver, raccoon, lynx, badger, otter, skunk, mink). These can typically be checked out from your regional Game & Fish office at no cost.
2. Card stock with track outlines that correspond to pelts. Ideally, these should be as close to real size as possible.
3. Students will need whiteboards or blank paper and a writing implement to draw with.

ACTIVITY

- Explain that today we are going to learn about wildlife in the winter time. We will get to touch a bunch of real animal furs, which are called “pelts.” These need to be touched carefully (demonstrate how to pet a pelt just like you’re petting a dog or cat).
- Explain that you will take out pelts one at a time. Students can guess (with quiet raised hands) what animal each pelt is from. Then, we will all get to take turns feeling the pelt and describing what it feels like, and talking about how this animal survives Wyoming winters.
- Once students are done exploring each pelt, students should use their whiteboard or paper/pencils to draw what they think the animal’s tracks in the snow/mud might look like. Each student can share this with the class or a partner, being sure to say *why* they think it might look that way.
- Finally, we will take out the card stock and show students what the track looks like.
 - Have you ever seen this track in the snow? Where did you see it?
 - Quiet raised hands can share stories.
- Thank students, and encourage them to look for tracks and animals staying warm this winter (but be careful not to approach wildlife- they like to be given lots of space).

Adaptations to cover with each animal:

Deer- Deer grow a thicker coat to keep them warm in the winter. They are “crepuscular” which means they like to be active at dawn (sunrise time) and dusk (sunset time). They bed down during the day. *If you were a deer in winter, where would you bed down?* They like to choose sheltered & possibly sunny spots to stay warm while they rest during the day and night.

Lynx- Lynx are very fluffy! This thick coat keeps them warm all winter, too. Lynx even have fur in between their toe pads on their paws to keep their feet warm and insulated from the snow. Their big feet work almost like snowshoes! Lynx like to be active at dawn and dusk just like deer, but sometimes their prey (the animals they eat, like rabbits and mice) are more active during the day in wintertime, so lynx adjust accordingly. *Why might they want to move around more in the daytime during winter? Do you get warmer when you run around?*

Coyote- Coyotes also have a thick coat that gets thicker for wintertime. They stay active to keep warm, walking an average of 3-9 miles per day. They raise their pups in a cozy den, dug into dirt.

Weasel- Weasel’s have two different coats! In the summer time, their pelt is brown, and in the winter, they shed their brown coat and grow in a white one! *Do you have different coats to wear for different seasons? Why do you think weasels do this?* (Camouflage, and white hair is hollow and insulates better). They start changing coat colors based on the length of the sunlight during the day. When the days begin to shorten, they shed the dark coat and grow a white one, and when the days start to get longer again in the spring, they shed the white coat and grow in their brown summer coat.

Bear- *Do you know what bears do in the winter?* Hibernate! They find a cave, hollowed out tree, or other nice sheltered nook and hunker down for the winter season. They don’t “sleep” like we do at night- it’s much deeper than that. Their heartbeat and breathing slows down, and their body uses much less energy. This is good, because they don’t eat for up to 6 months! Bears also have two layers to their coat- a soft outer coat and a dense undercoat. *Can you feel those two layers?*

Beaver- Beavers are called busy for a reason- they spend all summer gathering food to eat throughout the winter. *Do you know what beavers eat?* Trees! They don’t eat the whole tree, though, they only like to eat part of the bark called *Cambium*. Cambium has

lots of sugar and nutrients in it. So, when beavers are chewing down trees all summer and creating dams in the river, they also are stashing trees in the bottom of their pond. Here, the trees stay cool and preserved so the beavers can swim out of their lodges, grab some food, and swim back into their lodges all winter. Since beavers are doing lots of swimming in frigid water, their coat is thick and covered in oils to make it waterproof.

Red Fox- Foxes are very clever! *Have you ever planned ahead and saved a snack for sometime later when you knew you might be hungry?* Foxes do, too! They plan ahead to make winter survival easier by stashing food away in burrows during the summer to eat when it's harder to find in the winter. Foxes also have incredible hearing! It can be tricky to find mice running around under a few feet of snow. Foxes sit very still and listen for the mice, then pinpoint them and jump headfirst into the snow to catch a nice meal.

Badger- Badgers have thick, loose fitting fur that covers their body. They also have large claws that make it easier to dig burrows to keep them cozy in all winter. Badgers don't hibernate, but they do become significantly less active and spend more time in their burrows sleeping and avoiding the harsh elements.

River Otter- Otters live in the water, as their name suggests. Because of this, they have very dense, short hair. They are active during the daytime especially during the winter, and use the frozen water (ice) and snow to slip and slide around on instead of swimming.

Raccoon- Raccoons have thick fur, with a soft undercoat to keep them warm covered by guard hairs that shed water to keep them dry. During the winter, it can be hard for raccoons to find food (they like to eat frogs, toads, insects, and fish) so although they don't hibernate, they do sleep for long periods of time when the weather is especially harsh. During this time, they live off of fat reserves and lose a lot of weight. They like to spend their winters in hollow tree stumps, burrows left from other animals, or even attics in people's homes!

Skunk- The striped skunk is a small mammal who lumbers along slowly on tiny feet. They don't have to run to escape predators because they have an adaptive trait that stops predators in their tracks. Skunks have glands underneath their tails from which they can spray a very toxic musk at predators. Their bold stripe pattern on their fur is a warning sign to predators to keep their distance.

Mink- A mink is a mammal that belongs to the weasel family. Mink are semi-aquatic, meaning they spend part of their time on land and part in the water. Their webbed feet and fur are covered with oily substance which prevents their skin from getting soaked. Its long, streamlined body also helps it to swim quickly.