

Animal Track Tarp

Objective: Students will infer animal behavior by examining tracks on a tarp.

Students may work in groups of two or larger to examine tracks made on a canvas cloth. Students should try to guess what animals made the tracks, and what their behavior was that caused them to travel through that area.

Please make sure that students do not step on the canvas. It is recommended that the canvas is roped off to protect it.

These instructions should be read to the students:

"This is a scene that has taken place in a local woodland when snow was on the ground. Various animals have come to the stream. Your job is to be detectives and determine which animals made the tracks, why they came to that area, and what they did as they traveled across the area.

Things to know:

The stream is drawn in but not any trees, bushes, dens, brushpiles, or other natural objects found in the woods. Keep in mind that these objects are going to affect the animal behavior and you need to infer where these objects are and how they affected the track pattern."

Using a tracks guide, students will determine which animals made the tracks on their cloth. They will also need to answer the questions on the worksheet that go along with the tracks they are examining. In doing so, they will infer whether the animal was traveling alone, was being preyed upon, was acting as a predator, and where the animal was headed.

A notebook with pictures of the animals, their track and track pattern, and a drawing of their scat is included for reference. (A "scat" is the excrement of an animal.)

ANSWER KEY for tarp and worksheet

1. What animals made the tracks?

Cottontail Rabbit, Mallard Duck, Whitetail Deer, Great Horned Owl, Meadow Mouse, Muskrat, Raccoon, Red Fox, Squirrel.

2. Which animals were being preyed upon or pursued by a predator? Who was the predator and who was the prey?

The rabbit was pursued by the fox. The rabbit ran under some brush to hide and the fox walked around but gave up and left. A while after the fox left, the rabbit then hopped off. (Notice the spacing of the tracks. The rabbit tracks are further apart as it runs, closer together as it hops away after the fox leaves. Fox tracks look similar to other canines but the footprints are always in a line (as opposed to side to side like most mammals). The meadow mouse was walking along when a Great Horned Owl swooped down and grabbed him. (Notice the wing marks in the snow.)

3. Where are the other animals headed?

The deer stopped at the edge of the cloth to eat from a bush. It then crossed the stream.

The duck was swimming down the stream and got out to walk on land to get around the rocks.

The muskrat was swimming in the stream and got out and walked away.

The squirrel hopped up to a tree and climbed it.

The raccoon came to the stream, washed his hands and walked away.