

CSI

(Crittter Scene Investigation)

Activity Time

30 to 45 minutes

Materials

- Printed copy, one per student unless sharing, of Crittter Scene Investigation PDF: Six pages total, one clue sheet and five CSI scenes
- Pencils or other writing utensil

Objective

Students will use their critical thinking and problem solving skills to assess 'crittter scenes' and determine what Nebraska wild animals left clues behind and what happened at each scene.

Background

Animal signs left behind can be used to identify the Nebraska wild animals that live in an area. What evidence do wild animals leave behind as clues? Bones, feathers, sheds, tracks and even scat. There are clues all around us, your favorite fishing spot, grampa's farm and even your own backyard.

Observation is an important step in the scientific process. This important skill can be developed and put into practice by becoming familiar with signs animals leave behind and will connect students to local wildlife, nurture curiosity, exploration, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Procedure

- Introduce classroom to activity. *See also, CSI Introduction Video.*
 - Student will be the Crittter Scene Investigator. They will use their observation, problem-solving and critical-thinking skills to determine what animals were at the scene and what happened.
 - Each scene has two Nebraska wild animals, students will use the included clue sheet with Nebraska wildlife tracks and any clues or evidence to help them identify the animals at each scene.
 - At each scene students will write their name, the animals they hypothesize are in each scene, and what they think happened at each scene
 - Emphasize using clues left behind, thinking about predator/prey relationships and how animals survive and thrive in the wild.
 - Depending on the group of students, allow 3 to 5 minutes at each scene.
 - After all students have finished, discuss each scene as a group. There is no right or wrong in this exercise. *The most important thing is to have students ask questions and provide evidence to support their findings.*
 - Ask probing questions like: What do you think happened? What animals make a track like this? Why do you think this happened? What evidence do you have to support your hypothesis?

Evaluation

- *See also, CSI Evaluation Video for a virtual explanation of each scene.*

- There's no way we can know with 100% certainty what happened at each scene, we can only hypothesize using our observation skills, the resources we have and the clues or evidence left behind. Even when accurately identifying an animal from tracks, many different behaviors or situations could have taken place - all we can do is read the signs.
- **Scene 1:**
Animals- Duck and Striped Skunk
What Happened?- Momma duck left the nest and a striped skunk came and ate the eggs.
Probing Questions: What Nebraska wild animals have a webbed foot? What Nebraska wild animals like to eat eggs? What else could have happened if the skunk didn't eat the eggs?
- **Scene 2:**
Animals- Fox Squirrel and Coyote
What Happened?- Fox Squirrel was minding her on business eating some acorn when a coyote snatched her up for lunch.
Probing Questions: What are the things in the pile? (acorns) What Nebraska wild animals eat acorns? Why did these tracks end abruptly? What is a predator/prey?
- **Scene 3:**
Animals- Great Horned Owl and Snake
What Happened?- Great Horned Owl swooped down and snatched a snake for dinner.
Probing Questions: What Nebraska wild animals make an 'S' shaped track? What do these markings look like? (wings) What do Great Horned Owls eat?
- **Scene 4:**
Animals- Wild Turkey and Bobcat
What Happened?- Hunter shot the turkey. The smell of the blood attracted a bobcat.
Probing Questions: What other evidence, besides boot tracks, supports a human was at the scene? What animals can be hunted that would leave feathers at the scene? Are there claw marks in the second track? What animals do not leave claw marks in their tracks?
- **Scene 5:**
Animals- White-tailed Deer and Beaver
What Happened?- Nothing at all. Just two animals that passed through and a dead turtle shell.
Probing Questions: What animal with four legs has a webbed foot? Are any of the animals at the scene carnivores? Would any of the animals at the scene have eaten the turtle?