

Session: Gotcha! How Trapping is Catching On

Activity:

Grade Level: 5th

Objectives: Participants will explore the science and art of attracting and catching mammals for wildlife management, while discovering the benefits and reasons for this important tool in conservation. Students will be able to experience the methods and strategies of the Nebraska's fur harvester.

Test: Students will be able to identify three reasons that trapping helps Nebraska's wildlife populations and three methods used to attract specific mammals.

Duration: 30 minutes

Group Size: up to 20 students

Setting: Indoors

Key Terms: Furbearer, Mammal, Habitat, Population, Trap

Method: By sight and smell, students will discover the management of some of our wild mammal populations while exploring the background and current endeavor of trapping.

Materials in School Activity Kit:

- Pieces of Fur
- Finger Traps
- Scent Canisters (**Yellow**)
- Scent Canisters (**Red**)

Materials Needed to Conduct Activity:

Access to internet to view live/recorded video on designated site. Items provided in the School Kit.

Background Information:

From indigenous people through the expansion of the United States to today our country has relied on our wild mammal populations for many things. Originally, they were a source of food to eat, leather to build with and fur for staying warm. Later the fur of many of these critters was used as a form of currency to help secure needed items for survival and as a source of income to spark our new nation. Fashion has always factored into trapping with many cultures seeking out signs of their status and importance through different means.

Though trapping still encompasses all-of-the above, today's trappers have also been called on to help with conservation work for both common and rare animals of special interest. For common species it is often to help control their populations to avoid having too many and creating detrimental issues for themselves and other types of animals. These same trappers often help biologists track less common species and have helped catch some for relocation projects, too.

To be a successful trapper you must think like biologist and learn as much as you can about the mammal you are after.

- Where do they live?
- What do they eat?
- How do they communicate?

Using this information, you must then come up with a plan to decide where that critter will be in the future and where it might walk. To reach your goal the critter has to step right on a spot just a few inches wide. You will have a better chance of doing just that if you know what might attract them for a closer look, too.

Activity

Before the activity

Lay out the items provided in the School Kit (*as indicated*) on the desks/tables of each student.

Log onto the designated site for the live/recorded video.

Procedure

Follow along with the video-presenter, paying close attention to the times when he/she asks the class to handle or use an item provided in the School Kit. At these indicated times be sure to encourage your students to do as instructed to allow more senses to be engaged during the activity session.

The in-video presenter will:

- Begin with quick questions/review:
 - What makes an animal a mammal?
 - What are some very common wild, mammals that live in Nebraska?
 - When do these wild mammals usually come out to find food?
 - What does a coyote eat?
 - What does a raccoon eat?
- Discuss aspects of mammal fur including differences based on where a mammal lives and hunts. Along with providing some background information on the importance fur has served humans over our history.
SCHOOL KIT ITEM: FUR PIECES.
 - Students will be instructed to pick up and feel the piece of fur in front of them. Can they tell if the mammal lives and hunts around water (*short, & thick*) or spends most its time on land (*long and soft*).
- Talk about the role of trapping and how it is used today, who does it and how it takes place:
SCHOOL KIT ITEM: FINGER TRAP.
 - Traps are made to catch and hold mammals – *not hurt them*.
 - Students will be asked to place a finger, from different hands, in each

end of the finger trap until it catches or stops. (*note: thumbs should be used for students with small digits; fingers that can touch inside the trap often don't work*).

- Students then slowly start to pull their fingers away from each other in the opposite direction to become 'caught'!
 - What happens when the student pulls a little more?
(*note: a strong student may be able to pull hard enough to break the finger trap.*)
 - It may be uncomfortable, but does the finger trap hurt?
 - (*note: some students may need extra help to free their trapped fingers.*)
- Show how traps used for mammals look different but work in much the same way to hold an animal. Spring are used to make them work and they are made with steel to keep them from being broken.
 - Demonstrate how these traps are used and have to be hidden so that the mammals be targeted cannot see them.
 - Why are traps hidden from mammals such as coyotes or raccoons?
 - Show how we help attract our desired mammal to step exactly where we need them to now that the trap is hidden.
 - What catches your eye in this picture?
 - What kind of smells make your hungry?
 - How does your dog mark its territory?**SCHOOL KIT ITEM:** CANISTERS.
 - Students are instructed to leave both canisters down near their desk/table top when doing this exercise - *even when opening lids*.
 - Open the **YELLOW** lid. Take a breath. Do you smell anything?
 - Is it a good smell?
 - Do you want to get closer to the canister?

- Open the **RED** lid. Take a breath.
Do you smell anything?
 - o Is it a good smell?
 - o Do you want to get closer to the canister?
- Foods, urine and scents from other animals can attract other mammals.

Wrap Up

To conclude the in-video presenter will provide a quick review highlighting what was covered including how trapping is beneficial to Nebraska's wildlife and how today's trapper go about catching their specific mammal. *Watch out!...*

Conclusion

For more information go to:
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
<http://outdoornebraska.gov/trapping/>

Nebraska Fur Harvesters Association
<https://nebraskafurharvesters.com/>