

## “Tracking” Down the Secret Code / North American Animal “Who am I”

Sequencing: 30 Minutes

- Warm Up - 5 Minutes
- Types of Tracks Introduction: 5 Minutes
- Track and Fur Identification Stations: 10 Minutes
- Reveal Answers and Discuss: 10 Minutes

### Animal Tracking Activity:

#### 1. Warm Up Questions: 5 Minutes

- a. What animals live in the United States / Nebraska / Omaha?
  - i. (Example Responses: rabbits, deer, birds, fish, etc.)
  
- b. How do you know if an animal is in the area
  - i. (Example Responses: Tracks, homes, fur, food, poop/scat)
  
- c. What are animal tracks and types of tracks have you seen?
  - i. ( Example Responses: Dogs, cats, rabbits, raccoons, etc.)

#### 2. Types of Tracks Introduction: 5 Minutes

- a. Printed out tracks: Show off printed examples of common tracks that may be found in your area; pass them around and ask students what they notice about the tracks.
  
- b. Discuss types of movement:
  - i. Plantigrade locomotion (plant whole foot; dogs, bears, racoons)
  - ii. Digitigrade locomotion (walk or run on their toes; cats and coyotes)
  - iii. Unguligrade locomotion (walk on toenails/hooves; deer, and buffalo)

#### 3. Track and Fur identifications: 10 Minutes

- a. RANGER OPTION (With furs and tracks available):  
information: Have stations set up around the room and read the placards
  1. Tracking: Tracks have been printed into the sand
  2. Furs: Layed out for easy access
  
- b. CLASSROOM EDUCATOR OPTION (Without furs and tracks available):  
information: Have stations set up around the room with the placards
  1. Students will rotate around the room reading the placards
  2. Option to read the placards as a class and work together to guess the animal.
  
- c. Students will use their answer sheet to guess what animals made the tracks  
information:  
Easy: Answer space is given for each animal

1. (Example: The Otter's clue is the letter "N" that goes in box #1)
  2. Harder: The letters must be unscrambled to reveal the secret code.
4. Reveal and Discuss Answers: ~ 10 minutes
- a. The correct answer for both easy and hard levels is "NATIONAL PARKS!"

## Animal Clues:

North American River Otter: I am a long critter that lives in the river. I build my burrow close to the water, I love the water and find most of my food there. My relative also loves the water and lives in the ocean.

Eastern Cottontail: I have a little nose that twitches and looks very cute. I'm often seen in gardens munching on flowers, grasses, and vegetables. I'm terrified of humans though and can jump up to 15 feet when I am startled or running away from predators.

American Red Fox: I'm known for my sneaky personality. I have a vibrant fur that can be easy to spot. I will dive headfirst into the snow when I'm looking for food.

American Beaver: I'm a river engineer. I have big front teeth that help me gnaw through logs quickly.

Muskrat: I'm a member of the rodent family. I am semi-aquatic and swim underwater for 12 to 17 minutes. My tail has a unique shape; it's slightly flattened vertically to help me swim and navigate through the water.

Striped Skunk: When I'm threatened or frightened, I raise a big stink.

Black-Tailed Prairie Dog: I'm a little critter that lives in a town with all my relatives. When I'm frightened, excited, or danger is gone, I will jump up, throw my head and arms back, and let out a high-pitched yip sound to all my friends, who will join in as well!

American Bison: I'm an iconic American mammal. My home is in the great plains and prairies. I hold a lot of significance to Native Americans as my bones, meat, and furs are used for food, shelter, and tools.

North American Badger: I'm known for my grumpy personality. I'm small but mighty with large claws to attack my prey and dig my burrows.

Prairie Rattlesnake: I slither, I bite, I'm venomous. When I sense danger, I make a sound like a popular babies' toy.

Grey/Gray Wolf: I can eat up to 20 pounds per day of meat from animals like deer, elk, or mouse. I can sometimes roam up to 12 miles a day.

Bobcat: I have a short, bobbed tail. I may be little, but I can jump up to 12 feet to catch birds to eat. I may be related to a furry friend that you keep at home.

White Tailed Deer: When I'm born, I have white spots that disappear as I get older. The spots help me blend into my surroundings. My coat is usually light brown in color.

Grizzly Bear: I am a type of mammal whose height and strength are very great. I have big paws and thick fur and in dark caves, I hibernate!

## Optional Facts and Journal Quotes

Otter: The Otter is found on the sea coast and in the salt water. This animal, when fully grown, is as large as a common mastive [mastiff] dog. The ears and eyes are remarkably small, particularly the former which is not an inch in length thick, fleshy and pointed covered with short hair. The tail is about 10 inches in length thick where it joins the body and tapers to a very sharp point; in common with the body it is covered with a deep fir particularly on the upper side, on the under part the fur is not so long. The legs are remarkably short and the feet, which have five toes each, are broad, large and webbed.

Rabbit: The eye is large and prominent; the sight [pupil] is circular, deep sea green, and occupies one third of the width of the eye; the remaining two thirds is a ring of a bright yellowish silver colour. the years are placed at the upper part of the head and very near to each other, the years are very flexible, the animal moves them with great ease and quickness and can contra[c]t them and fold them on his back or delate [dilate?] them at pleasure— the front outer fold of the year is a redis brown, the inner folds or those which ly together when the years are thrown back and wich occupy two thirds of the width of the year is of a clear white colour except one inch at the time of the year which is black, the hinder foald is of a light grey the sides as they approach the belly grow lighter becoming gradually more white the belly and is white with a shade of lead colour— the hair is long and fine— the tale is white round and blount pointed the fur on it is long and extremely fine and soft when it runs it carries it's tale strait behind the direction of the body— the body is much smaller and more length than the rabbit in proportion to its height— it's food is grass or herbs— it resorts the open plains, is extremely fleet and never burrows to takes shelter in the ground when pursued, I measured the leaps of one which I surprised in the plains on the 17th Inst. and found them 21 feet the ground was a little descending they appear to run with more ease and to bound with greater agility than any animal I ever saw.

Red Fox: it's colour was of a lighter brown, it's years proportionally larger, and the tail not so large or the hair not so long which formed it. They are very delicately formed, exceedingly fleet, and not as large as the common domestic cat. Their talons appear longer than any species of fox I ever saw and seem therefore prepared more amply by nature for the purpose of burrowing.

Beaver: [W]e saw many beaver and some otter today; the former dam up the small channels of the river between the islands and compel the river in these parts to make other channels; which as soon as it has affected that which was stopped by the beaver becomes dry and is filled up with mud sand gravel and driftwood. The beaver is then compelled to seek another spot for his habitation where he again erects his dam. Thus the river in many places among the clusters of islands is constantly changing the direction of such sluices as the beaver are capable of stopping or of 20 yds. in width. this animal in that way I believe to be very instrumental in adding to the number of islands with which we find the river crowded.

Muskrat: Muskrats were mentioned only briefly in the expedition journals (e.g., August 7, 1805), but in contrast to beaver no special note was made of these familiar and relatively valueless animals, at least as to their pelt values.

Skunk: The only mention of this species in the Great Plains was a comment made by Lewis as to seeing a "PoleCat" near the mouth of the White River in South Dakota. Another was seen near the mouth of the Musselshell River in Montana on May 25, 1805. The Lakotas honored skunks for their refusal to retreat in the face of danger, and sometimes their chiefs tied the skins of skunks to their heels to symbolize the fact that they never ran from a battle. Like the badger, wolf, and fox, the skunk possessed special symbolic powers to the tribes of the high plains.

Prairie Dog: Discovered a Village of Small animals that burrow in the grown (those animals are Called by the French Petit Chien) Killed one & Caught one a live by pouring a great quantity of water in his hole we attempted to dig to the beds of one of those animals, after digging 6 feet, found by running a pole down that we were not half way to his Lodges, we found 2 frogs in the hole, and killed a Dark rattleSnake near with a Ground rat in him, (those rats are numerous) the Village of those animals Covs. about 4 acres of Ground on a Gradual descent of a hill and Contains great numbers of holes on the top of which those little animals Set erect make a Whistling noise and when alarmed Slip into their hole— we poured into one of the holes 5 barrels of water without filling it, Those Animals are about the Size of a Small Squirrel . . . & thicker, the head much resembling a Squirrel in every respect, except the ears which is Shorter, his tail like a ground Squirrel which thy Shake & whistle when allarmd. the toe nails long, they have fine fur & the longer hair is gray,

Bison: Bison were not encountered by Lewis and Clark until they had nearly reached the mouth of the Kansas River. A Large herd of about 500 animals was observed on September 9 above the mouth of the Niobrara River, but none was killed until August 23rd, when they had reached the vicinity of present day Vermillion, South Dakota. Burroughs calculated that at least 227 bison were killed during the expedition. "I ascended the hills from whence I had a most pleasing view of the country, particularly of the wide and fertile valleys formed by the missouri and the Yellowstone rivers . . . the whole face of the country was covered with herds of Buffalo, Elk, Antelopes; deer are also abundant, but keep themselves more concealed in the woodland. the buffalo Elk and Antelope are so gentle that we pass near them while feeding, without appearing to excite any alarm among them, and when we attract their attention, they

frequently approach us more nearly to discover what we are, and in some instances pursue us a considerable distance apparently with that view.

**Badger:** Near present-day Omaha, a badger was killed on July 20, 1804. Another was brought into Fort Mandan by one of the party on January 18, 1805. The species was called a "barrow" by the expedition members. The Oglala branch of the Lakotas regarded the badger as having great strength and tenacity, and its symbolic powers extended to the healing of sick children.

**Rattle Snake:** Many encounters with rattlesnakes were reported by the expedition; one of the earliest that certainly involved the prairie rattlesnake occurred on May 17, 1805, near the mouth of the Yellowstone River. Rattlesnakes were also encountered in Missouri, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Expedition members later encountered rattlesnakes at least a dozen times on the plains of Montana, including several near escapes from being bitten. The western rattlesnake was not formally described and given a Latin name until 1818.

**Wolf:** Game is still very abundant; we can scarcely cast our eyes in any direction without perceiving deer Elk Buffalo or Antelopes. The quantity of wolves appear to increase in the same proportion; they generally hunt in parties of six eight or ten; they kill a great number of the Antelopes at this season; the Antelopes are yet meagre and the females are big with young; the wolves take them most generally in attempting to swim the river; in this manner my dog caught one drowned it and brought it on shore; they are but clumsy swimmers, tho' on land when in good order, they are extremely fleet and durable. We have frequently seen the wolves in pursuit of the Antelope in the plains; they appear to decoy a single one from a flock, and then pursue it, alternately relieving each other until they take it.

**Bobcat:** Whitehouse brought me a robe which he purchased of the Indians formed of three Skins of the Tiger Cat, this Cat differs from any which I have ever Seen. It is found on the borders of the plains and the woody Country lying along the Pacific Ocean. This animal is about the Size or rather larger than the wild Cat of our Country and is much the Same in form, agility and ferocity. The colour of the back, neck and Sides, is a reddish brown irregular variegated with Small Spots of dark brown the tail is about two inches long nearly white except the extremity which is black; it terminates abruptly as if it had been cut off. The belly is white with Small black spots. beautiful variegated. the legs are of the Same Colour with the Sides and back marked with transverse stripes of black the ears are black on the outer Side Covered with fine black hair, Short except at the upper point which is furnished with a pencil of very fine Straight black hair,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch in length, the fur of this animal is long and fine. much more So than the wild Cat of the U States but less so than the Louserva of the N West. The natives of this Country make great use of the skins of this Cat, to form the robes which they wear; three whole Skins is the complement usually employed, and Sometimes four in each roab. Those Cats are not marked alike many of them have but few Spots of a darker Colour, particularly on the Back.

**White Tail Deer:** Deer of this common and widespread eastern species were seen from near the start of the expedition north and west of the Three Forks region of Montana. Burroughs

calculated that at least 1001 deer were killed during the expedition. Deer were rather uniformly taken on the upstream phase from central Missouri to the Montana mountain ranges. Usually the specific identity of the deer killed was not reported.

Grizzly Bear: We saw . . . many tracks of the white bear of enormous size, along the river shore and about the carcasses of the Buffalo, on which I presume they feed. We have not yet seen one of these animals, though their tracks are so abundant and recent. The men as well as ourselves are anxious to meet one of these bears. The Indians give a very formidable account of the strength and ferocity of this animal, which they never dare to attack but in parties of six, eight or ten persons; and are even then frequently defeated with the loss of one or more of their party. The savages attack this animal with their bows and arrows and the indifferent guns with which the traders furnish them, with these they shoot with such uncertainty and at so short a distance . . . that they frequently miss their aim & fall a sacrifice to the bear. . . . this animal is said more frequently to attack a man on meeting with him, than to flee from him. When the Indians are about to go in search of the white bear, prior to their departure, they paint themselves and perform all those superstitious rights commonly observed when they are about to make war upon a neighbouring nation.

#### Information Sources:

Johnsgard, P. A. (2003). Lewis and Clark on the Great Plains: a natural history. Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.(n.d). <https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/item/lc.jrn.1806-02-23>.



## Track Down the Secret Code

**Directions:** Using the furs and tracks around the room, identify which animal it belongs to. Each item will have a letter attached to it. Match the item with the animal to solve the code word.

### Code Word

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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9	10	11	12	13	14
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## What Animal Am I? Answer Key

1. North American River Otter
2. Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
3. American Red Fox
4. American Beaver
5. Muskrat
6. Striped Skunk
7. Black-Tailed Prairie Dog
8. American Bison
9. North American Badger
10. Prairie Rattle Snake
11. Grey Wolf
12. Bobcat
13. White-Tail Deer
14. Grizzly Bear

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