

Why Alligators Look Like They Do

Subject: Science, Reading, Writing

Duration: 30 minutes

Location: Classroom

Key Vocabulary: Adaptation, reptile

Related Activities: Win, Lose or Adapt; Night Sounds; Habitat Hunt; Alligator Hole Ecodrama; Animal Olympics; Please Don't Feed the Gators

Florida Sunshine State Standards: LA.C.1.2



Objectives. The student will be able to: a) recognize why adaptations are important, and b) list two specific adaptations of the alligator

Method. The students will read a short story which discusses adaptations of the alligator.

Background. Alligators are adapted to survive in the Everglades. For further information about alligators see the information in the "Natural History" section on reptiles.

Materials

- Blackline master - "Why Alligators Look Like They Do"

Evaluation

Ask the students to list two specific adaptations of the alligator that enable it to survive in the Ever-

Suggested Procedure

1. Read the short story on the blackline master with your students.
2. Discuss adaptations. Ask the students why adaptations are important. Can you identify adaptations of the alligator?

Extension

Have the students write their own story, patterned after the alligator story, but using another animal found in the Everglades/South Florida national parks.

WHY ALLIGATORS LOOK LIKE THEY DO

By Jim Lester

Did you ever wonder why alligators look like they do? Why are they bumpy and lumpy and flip-floppy, too? There must be a good reason they look that way. Could it be what happened to them one windy day? Yes, something happened - they weren't always as they are. And there were more alligators around then, both near and far. What happened? What happened, you say - what could it be? Just open your ears, your eyes, LISTEN, and you'll see!

This is a once upon a time story ... Very once upon a time.

First, let me tell you how alligators used to look and a little about what they were like. There were more alligators during this once upon a time than any other kind of animal. And the alligators were all kinds of colors; some blue, some red, some yellow, and others were orange and green. And they could change colors almost anytime they wanted to, and sometimes they could make themselves invisible.

And they had some silly habits too ... like cracking their knuckles. Yes, they could be heard cracking their knuckles for at least three-quarters of a mile. They'd quite often do that before reaching up high in the lofty, leafy limbs of the scary cherry tree to get the very hairy berries that grew there.

Another silly habit was that on the third day after a full moon, they would come together in groups of exactly ninety-three and form a large circle and hold hands and dance from sunset to dawn. And the circles would go around and around. And at these times there was so much singing that the whole world was enchanted by the very sounds they made.

Oh, they were the best singers. They didn't sing in words (they weren't people), but their magic was so beautiful that whenever they started singing, all of the other animals stopped whatever they were doing to listen and that was a lot, because alligators were always happy.

And they had cute, some would say even pretty, faces and very pleasant smiles, especially when they sang or picked a bunch of very hairy berries after cracking their knuckles.

Now, everything sounded fine ... and it was ... UNTIL ...

UNTIL: The winds changed ... no one knows why ... but a new south wind began to blow, and with these strange winds, a most unusual fallout showered the landscape. Could it be? Yes, it was HOT snow! At first, all of the animals tried to hide, but soon everyone was playing and splashing. And so the alligators joined them. And they would throw snowballs at each other.

Then the winds changed again, and it started raining dry rain! It was so unusual that all the animals tried to hide, but soon everyone was out playing. And as the animals climbed up out of the Everglades onto rocks and limbs, the dry rain would strike them and dry off their noses and toeses.

But the winds changed once again, and this time a still hurricane came in from offshore. And the winds didn't blow, and they didn't blow still harder and they didn't blow at all. The animals were afraid that nothing was going to blow away.

And the winds changed for a fourth and final time. Then something even stranger than ever before happened. Yes, it was even stranger than hot snow; even stranger than dry rain; and it was even stranger than a still hurricane. When the winds changed for the final time, PEOPLE came. All of the animals were afraid and tried to hide. A lot of the alligators just made themselves invisible.

Soon, most of the animals stopped hiding, but the people did not seem to even care. And there are some animals still hiding to this very day. Now the really strange thing is that the people seemed to be sort of (rather) blind and sort of (rather) deaf. And all they seemed to think was that the alligators are sort of ugly and sort of weird, and sort of slimy, and sort of dumb. But what a secret the alligators have. I think ... but I'm not sure ... that those alligators have been working very hard - to make us think - that they are lumpy and bumpy and flip-floppy all over, BECAUSE ...

Would you believe that alligators still see themselves in different colors? To people, they are just black like night, but to each other, there are some blue, some red, some yellow, and others orange and green. The little babies haven't quite learned to keep that a complete secret as yet, and if you look close, you can really see some of their color.

And would you believe that when an alligator roars and bellows that they are really singing beautiful music? You understand, of course, that we cannot hear all of the enchanting sounds because we haven't learned to use our ears like the animals that live in the Everglades. All we hear are unpleasant noises. Oh, how clever they are to hide their special music from us. But watch closely, and you'll see that all the other animals still stop whatever they are doing and sit quietly just to listen to the happiest, most beautiful sounds the world has ever known.

And do you believe that the alligators get together on the third day after a full moon and dance in big circles of ninety-three? It's still true! And they go around and around and oh, how they sing. And how happy they must be to dance from sunset to dawn.

What? You say how can that be ... no person has ever seen alligators dancing. But how tricky is the alligator? They can still disappear whenever they want, and they always disappear when they dance. They can't even help it ... it's automatic.

And what about those silly, crazy habits like cracking their knuckles? Well, they only crack their knuckles under water now.

And they still love the very hairy berries from the scary cherry tree. You can tell because you can smell the very berry juice on their breath when the wind is just right and you know what to smell for. But where they find those scary cherry trees is still a deep mystery.

And now, the most important part of the story of all ... What happened to the cute pretty faces the alligators used to have? Can you guess? Yes, they still have the most beautiful faces the world has ever seen. And

there is just one thing the crafty alligator could not hide from people, and that's his smile. Look close and you'll see that they can even smile when they yawn.

So the real reason the alligators look like they do, is that it's all a big game ... a disguise we can't see through. For some reason or other, they want to trick us this way. They probably laugh and laugh when we can't see them play. I think I know just what the problem is, we don't try hard enough to look ... and look what we miss!

