

Stories in the Snow

Outdoor Activity

In this activity, students will look for stories in the snow. The snow provides an incredible canvas and animal evidence is often left behind, making it the perfect story making tool. Students will first look at track story examples and then have the opportunity to find and make their own story from what they see in the snow. Upon close examination of this evidence, characters are revealed and stories unfold of animal life in winter.

Instructions

1. Print and copy enough of the “My Track Story Planner” and “Animal Tracks Booklet” for all your students.
2. Using the attached “Winter Track Stories” and the discussion section below work through the tracking images and the discussion questions. This is meant to get students engaged and excited for finding and making their own stories.
3. Introduce the “Animal Tracks Booklet”.
4. Go outside, explore your schoolyard or nearby natural area after a snowfall (24 – 72 hours after a snowfall is usually the best time for finding quality tracks in the snow).
5. By using careful observation and reflecting on outdoor animal tracking and reasoning, students will uncover the amazing stories in the snow. Encourage them to use their “Track Story Planner” as a guide. Draw the track story, detail 3 events, consider who the characters are, the setting, and finally the conclusion.
6. Use the “Animal Tracks booklet” to help identify any tracks and consider using the ecological information provided to add detail to student’s story planners.
7. Back in the classroom, guide the students in creating their stories using the “Track Story Planner” they filled out in the field.

Materials:

- [Winter Track Stories](#) and corresponding questions and discussion below.
- [My Track Story Planner](#)
- Clipboards for students to put their Story Planners on
- [Animal Tracks Booklet](#)
- Resources from the Tracking Lesson Plan may also be helpful in delivering this activity.

Discussion

Tracks can tell you what animals are present in your area and offer a glimpse into the animal’s “story”. Some tracks may lead to holes that allow animals to enter tunnels to the subnivean layer in the snow. Sometimes you may be treated with tracks of birds walking in the snow or even more spectacularly, a display of feathers and wings marking the top of the snow from a bird of prey. If tracks are followed long enough students may find bathrooms, kitchens, and resting or sleeping areas. By spending some quality

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time following tracks, students get a real ‘feel’ for the day in the life of an animal. These tracks also tell stories of resourcefulness, struggle, and undoubtable create a sense of wonder. This wonder is the provocation for storytelling and the reason for this activity.

Track Story Questions and Discussions

Track Story #1

What do you notice?

- There is a zigzag pattern with two small front feet and two long back feet. There is also a large “starburst” pattern.

Who might be the characters and what might be happening?

- Snowshoe hare place their large hind feet in front of its front feet in order to hop. These tracks are not in a straight line, something must have been chasing the hare. There are no other footprints in the snow, so what was chasing the hare?
- The “starburst” is a distinct track made by a bird of prey, such as an owl. The owl dropped down to grab the hare with its talons and left-wing marks in the snow. Did the owl catch the hare.

Track Story #2

What do you notice?

- Here there are 3 “starburst” patterns in a row. You may also notice that each track is a little lighter before it completely disappears.

Who might be the characters and what might be happening?

- These types of tracks can be found in the forest or at the edge. This pattern was made by a bird taking off from the ground. Look at the toes. Three straight toes are characteristic of ground birds, in this case, a ruffed grouse. Why is the first track in the series fuller than the rest? The bird was likely trying to take (or lift) off the ground. Where do the tracks disappear to? The bird likely took flight (at least temporarily).

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Track Story #3

What do you notice?

- In these tracks, the back feet are bigger than the front feet but all four feet are quite small. There is also a line behind each of the tracks. The tracks disappear into a hole and then we see another hole and the same tracks reappear.

Who might be the characters and what might be happening?

- A mouse likely made these tracks. The lines between and behind the track show that it's a mouse (as they have longer tails) than other small mammals (such as voles and Winter Ecology | Stories in the Snow 4 shrews). The holes represent a tunnel under the snow. Mice do not stay long on top of the snow. They tunnel under the snow because it provides some protection from predators and cold temperatures.

Track Story #4

What do you notice?

- The tracks on the bottom look familiar, large back feet that in front of small front feet. We also see a large hole and the tracks disappear. The other set of tracks show an animal that has five toes and no claw marks. The pattern indicates that it is a bounder.

Who might be the characters and what might be happening?

- The hopper is the snowshoe hare and it looks like it may have plunged into a hole to avoid something, perhaps a predator. The other track is indeed a predator, in this case a large weasel such as a marten or a fisher. These mammals are carnivores and would be happy to have a hare for lunch.