

Animal Tracking

Ages: Grades 3-6

Time: 1 hour

No. of participants: 10-12

No. of additional adults:

1

Required supplies:

- Book *Big Tracks, Little Tracks: Following Animal Prints* by Millicent E. Selsam
- Plaster of Paris
- Bottle of water
- Mixing container
- Mixing stick
- Popsicle sticks - 1/student with name written on it.
- Baggies (1/student)
- Animal Tracks activity sheet
- Pencils
- Clipboards

Objective: To learn about what animal makes what kind of tracks and why. To use plaster of paris to create casts of animal prints. To match animals with their tracks.

Lesson Plan Procedures

**Before doing this lesson, the leader must find a place where print casts can be made. This works best in mud or very fine sand/dirt.*

1. Introduction:

- a. Find an outdoor setting to read *Big Tracks, Little Tracks: Following Animal Prints* by Millicent E. Selsam. Take time to discuss questions posed throughout the book.

2. Beginning Instructions:

- a. Today each of you will get a chance to make a cast of an animal track....
- b. We have these tracks already made - you will use these to make a print in the mud and then fill it in with plaster to make what is called a cast.
- c. Let's take a look at the casts we have here... Who thinks they might know what animal made one of them? Go through all of the tracks this way.
- d. Alright, now I'm going to mix up some plaster.
 - i. Mix up a large batch of plaster (figure about ½ c. per student), add water until mixture is thick and smooth.
 - ii. **MOVE QUICKLY ONCE THE PLASTER IS MIXED!**
- e. Now, I'd like each of you to choose the track that you would like to make a cast of. As the students choose, help them find a place to make to make the print and then use the cast to press into the ground and make a print. After doing this, spray the dirt off with water.
- f. After each student makes their track - walk around with the plaster mixture and help the students pour it into his/her print.
- g. After the plaster is poured, have the student place his/her popsicle stick with their name on it in the ground next to the print.

3. Main Lesson:

- a. *Once all of the students poured the plaster mixture into their print, gather them all back together.*
- b. *Hand out the Animal Tracks activity sheet - allow time for them to complete the sheet. Discuss answers together when everyone has finished. (Answer guide: 1.) Cottontail 2.) Bison 3.) Porcupine 4.) Grizzly bear 5.) Coyote 6.) Kangaroo rat 7.) Moose 8.) Armadillo 9.) Beaver 10.) Cotton rat 11.) Red Squirrel 12.) Wood rat 13.) Mountain lion 14.) Gray fox)*
- c. *Allow the prints to harden for 45 -60 minutes. You will have to go back and get the tracks and put them into a baggie with their popsicle stick for identification. Return them to the campers when possible.*

4. Conclusion:

- a. *Encourage the students to be on the lookout now for animal signs, especially tracks! Explain that these signs are reminders that we share the forest with the animals and that we need to be respectful of them and their home.*