

Animal Tracks Stories



Tracks are a fun way to learn about wildlife, but they can be tricky. There are hoppers like squirrels, diagonal or perfect steppers like cats, waddlers like raccoons, and bounders like weasels. This activity will teach you how to make your own animal track stories that can be used to help students interpret animal tracks and animal behaviors.

Getting Started – It's Easy!

Who: Upper Elementary and Middle School

Where: Indoor or Outdoor Classroom, At Home

Materials: Paper or canvas, ink, track stamps or stencils, paint, local animal track references

Length of time: 15 minutes to prep, 15-30 minutes for activity

Lessons to pair it with: Signs of Winter Wildlife

Note Start with, *Build Your Own Animal Tracks*. Protective material such as cardboard or paper should be put down to protect the work surface.

Let's Begin:

- Rubber track replicas and a large ink pad were used to create tracks.
 - rubber replicas can be purchased online, try <https://www.acornnaturalists.com/>
 - use our Build Your Own Animal Tracks activity for additional methods
- Reading the track story:



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Leading the discussion

- Start by asking questions and looking at the toes and feet, first identifying the species and where the tracks are going. Sometimes reading up about the animals can give you more information for reading these clues. It is also a good way to introduce why and how we can tell different tracks and track patterns apart.
- Look at the overall pattern and where the tracks overlap or don't.
- Think about whether they seemed to have been in the same area at the same time or if you can't tell. Why do you think this?

Understanding the track story provided.

- The chipmunk and the red fox walk a similar path, but is it the same and what could have happened?
- The chipmunk tracks can be seen visiting plants in this habitat, a meadow or field. We see the small feet land first and then the bigger back feet land in front as it hops from plant to plant.
- The fox toes point in the opposite direction of the chipmunk and appear to trace the chipmunk's path, but likely never crossed in this area since there is no disturbed ground that would indicate a fight.
- Then a white-tailed deer seems to have crossed the same area but might not have ever seen the chipmunk or fox.
- The deer walked its own path and barely crossed the other two animals.

Create Your Own Track Story

- Some questions to ask yourself;
 - In what habitat does your track story take place? What species would realistically be found within that habitat?
 - What kind of interaction do you want the animals to have? Would your story have the chipmunk trail end where it meets the fox? You can incorporate different animal behaviors, predators and prey, and track styles.
 - You can also have other elements drawn in or represented like food litter (acorn shells or pine cone scales where the animal stopped to eat), fur (loose fur can sometimes come loose in a fight), animal scat or poop (droppings are also a unique way to ID animals. Though express taking caution and not using or touching wild scat.)
 - You may want a key in the corner of your story to help show what something represents if it is not clear in the drawing. However, this does not need to reveal what the animal species is unless desired.
- Lay your paper or canvas on an open, flat surface. Visualize your story on the paper or, using pencil, lightly sketch your story on the paper. You may want to sketch out a plan on a smaller paper first.
- Then start drawing and or stamping your story on the paper.
 - If you do not have a way of making actual track patterns, you can use any other shapes, even finger painting! Then create a key for your marks so anyone can understand your unique track pattern.
 - Be sure to include other key elements like plants, scat, food litter, or other items.
 - If necessary, write up a short description of the story such as what habitat this takes place in or what region.

Have fun and share your track stories with others. Then go outside and see if you can find any real track stories. Remember to look for patterns that disturb the natural look of the landscape and be sure to always follow safe outdoor practices such as the buddy system, telling someone where you are going and dress for the weather.