

# Hoo Gives a Hoot

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Grade Levels: 4-12 (May be adapted for adults)

## Nutshell

Students are introduced to owls and their nighttime adaptations. Students directly experience the nighttime in a fun situation by using an owl predation game.

## Objectives

After completing this lesson, students will be able to

- List five unique characteristics of owls;
- Define the terms diurnal and nocturnal
- Learn nighttime predator-prey adaptations and strategies;
- Sharpen their perceptions of the nighttime environment through focusing on their senses of hearing, sight, and touch;
- Learn how to function quietly and safely in the dark-move, listen, and observe.

# Hoo Gives a Hoot Pre-visit Activities

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*The following materials are aids to help prepare your students for their visit to the Central Wisconsin Environmental Station. The vocabulary list contains terms and concepts your students will encounter in their visit. Please modify the definitions as needed. The activities listed below are merely options—it is not necessary to do them all or to follow any particular order. Keep in mind that your students' learning experiences at CWES will be enhanced if they are familiar with these concepts and terms prior to the on-site activities.*

## **Vocabulary**

**Adaptation:** a special feature or characteristic possessed by a living thing that helps it survive well in its environment.

**Diurnal Animal:** an animal that is most active during the daylight hours.

**Nocturnal Animal:** an animal that is most active during the night.

## **Activity #1**

Begin by talking with the students about their parents' occupations. Guide the discussion to make the point that there are a variety of occupations requiring people to work at various times of the day or night. Explain that in nature, an animal that is active mainly during the daylight hours is a diurnal animal. An animal that is most active during the night is said to be nocturnal. List some of the differences between diurnal and nocturnal lifestyles of humans and other animals.

## **Activity #2**

Play a game of animal charades. Assign each student an animal to act out. Tell them that the only clue they can give prior to their acting is to say "nocturnal" or "diurnal" as a description of their animal. When the class guesses the correct animal, discuss as a group the adaptation of that animal for day or night activity. (An option to this activity is to assign an animal to a group of 4 to 6 students. They must then work as a team to act out their animal. This is probably best done with upper elementary or middle school students.)

## **Activity #3**

Have the students make an owl or an owl mask from a paper grocery or lunch bag. The owls can be decorated any way. Be creative!

## Hoo Gives a Hoot Post-visit Activities

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*A visit to the Central Wisconsin Environmental Station can be a school-year highlight for both students and their educators. We feel the knowledge and concepts gained during a Station visit apply outside the Station as well. The following activities will allow students to expand their knowledge and help them incorporate those lessons into their everyday lives. Feel free to pick from and modify the activities as best suits your group.*

### Activity #1

Review the characteristics of owls and their effectiveness as nocturnal predators. Have the students individually list all of the reasons they can remember or think of that owls could represent nature's "perfect mousetrap." When they have completed their lists, ask them to use their reasons to develop a billboard advertisement designed to promote "owl mousetraps."

### Activity #2

Discuss with the class the idea that there are, in addition to owls, a whole range of living things that are especially adapted for being active at night. (i.e., bats' echo-location, skunks' warning colors for nocturnal activity, animals with more elaborate "call" communications than visual displays, animals with adaptive ear shapes and sizes).

Have each student select and research the physical and behavioral adaptations of one animal specially adapted to nocturnal activity. If the students cannot think of an appropriate animal, suggestions can be made or the students may wish to browse through books on night animals for ideas. When all the students have obtained their information, hold a "Spotlight on Night" session in which the students present their findings about their animal's nighttime adaptations. Perhaps the room lights can be turned off and a backlight used to add to the "atmosphere."

Following the presentation, have the students design a predator animal or prey animal adapted to being active at night. Using large sheets or paper and markers, the students should draw their animals and depict the various adaptations their creation has for nighttime activity. Have each student write a short description of their animal and its adaptations and display the pictures and descriptions around the room.

### Activity #3

Have the students dissect owl pellets to see what the owl had for supper. Based on its diet, can you tell what type of owl it was? Owl pellets are available for purchase from Acorn Naturalists, 17300 East 17<sup>th</sup> St., #J-236, Tustin, CA 92780, (800) 422-8886

### Activity #4

## Hoo Gives a Hoot Post-visit Activities

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Explore reasons why the students think that owls used to be symbols of evil or bad occurrences. What animals have been associated with similar fallacies? Ask students to research folklore related to a specific species' ill-fated image and search for information about the scientific truth behind these stories, have them share and discuss their findings with others.

# Hoo Gives a Hoot Resources

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## Teacher Resources

- Alcorn, Gordon, Dee. 1986. *Owls: An Introduction for the Amateur Naturalist*. New York: Prentice-Hall Press. 176 pp.
- Burton, John A., Ed. 1973. *Owls of the World: Their Evolution, Structure, and Ecology*. New York: Dutton. 216pp.
- Cameron, Angus and Peter Parnall. 1972. *The Nightwatchers*. Four Winds Press: New York. 111pp.
- Heintzelman, Donald S. 1984. *Guide to Owl Watching in North America*. Piscataway, NJ: Winchester Press. 193pp.
- Roots, Clive. 1974. *Animals of the Dark*. New York: Praeger. 199pp.
- Sparks, John. 1989. *Owls; Their Natural and Unnatural History*. New York: Facts on File. 240pp.
- Sparks, John, and Tony, Soper. 1995. *Owls*. Devonshire, England: David and Charles. 240pp.
- Sutton, Patricia and Clay. 1994. *How to Spot an Owl*. Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd. 144pp.

## Children's' Literature

- Arnotsky, Jim. 1995. *All About Owls*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.
- Esbensen, Barbara Juster. 1991. *Tiger with Wings: The Great Horned Owl*. New York: Orchard Books.
- Scattler, Helen Roney. 1994. *The Book of North American Owls*. New York: Clarion Books. 65pp.
- Stone, Lynn M. 1989. *Owls*. Vero Beach, Fl: Rourke Enterprises. 24pp.
- Zoobooks*. Wildlife Education Ltd. Vol. 4, No. 6. March 1997.
- Yolen, Jane. 1987. *Owl Moon*. New York: Philomel Books.