

A Sense of Wonder...

Wildlife Detective

What to do

Method

Children ask questions to discover what kind of animal is illustrated on their back.

Materials Location

Pictures of wild animals,
masking tape

Indoors or outdoors



Art Shomo

Find fairly good-sized photos of wild animals. (You could use past issues of this magazine or print ones off the Internet.) Tape a photo of a wild animal on a child's back. (Don't let the child see the image.) Have the children turn around so that the other children can see the picture. The child then asks questions to discover his new "identity." When they think they know who they are, they make a guess. If they guess wrong, they keep on asking questions until they guess their identity correctly. The questions must have Yes-No answers. Examples: Do I have fur? Do I have four legs? Am I cold-blooded? Do I eat only meat?

This game will make the student think about an animal's characteristics. You may want to make permanent cards by mounting the photos on posterboard. (To help reduce household waste you may use the cardboard from used cereal boxes or shipping boxes you receive.) If you wish, you can punch holes in the cardboard and tie string or yarn through the holes so the photo can be worn around the neck.

A variation of this activity involves having all the children place an animal picture on their backs at the same time. The children then walk around, taking turns asking questions to discover their identity. When a child thinks he knows his identity, he writes it down on a slip of paper along with his name and hands it to you. When everyone is finished, call the children back up one at a time and have them stand with their back to the other children. Then read the child's guess with a brief discussion on what question helped them guess correctly. If the guess is wrong, help them ask some additional questions to figure it out.

Another variation of this activity doesn't require the use of signs. A child leaves the room while the other children pick an animal. The child then returns and asks questions as described above to identify the animal.

Nature Note

The annual cycle of antler growth is a source of wonder for many folks. When daylight hours begin to lengthen in early spring, the pituitary gland of the buck is stimulated to produce the hormone prolactin, triggering the production of antlers. A soft velvet-like covering protects and nourishes the growing antlers. Beneath the velvet, blood vessels carry and deposit calcium and other minerals.

Throughout spring and summer, antlers continue to grow. By September, an increase in the level of the hormone testosterone in the blood dries up the blood supply to the antlers, and they become hardened. The male deer then begin to rub off the dried velvet and polish their new antlers in preparation for combat with other bucks during the breeding seasons. As the shorter days of winter arrive, the buck's testosterone level drops and the antlers are shed, usually by late winter.

The size of antlers varies, depending upon heredity and diet. The number of points on antlers varies as well, with the antlers of animals in their prime generally carrying more points than those of younger and older bucks.

The development and loss of antlers is just one of the many responses of the white-tailed deer to the cycle of the seasons.



Mark Stock

Buck in velvet.