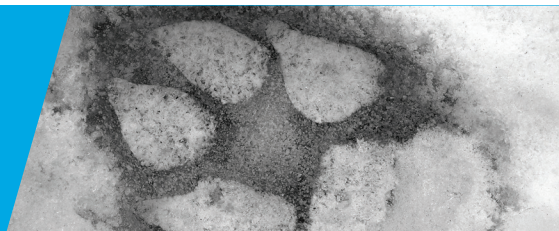


CURIOSITY AT HOME

ANIMAL TRACKS



We can learn a lot about animals by looking at the tracks they leave behind. Play a matching game to identify animal tracks, and create your own tracks in playdough!

MATERIALS

- Animal tracks matching game (included on following pages)
- Playdough, you can make your own with this recipe: pbs.org/parents/crafts-and-experiments/no-bake-playdough-recipe
- Paper or science notebook for making drawings and observations
- Something to write with
- Plastic animal figurines
- **Optional:** toothpicks, forks, spoons, or fingers to create tracks.

PROCEDURE

- Print and cut out animal tracks matching game (on following pages)
- Match the animal cards with the track cards. (**Answer key on pg 2**)
- Make some observations about each animal track. How many legs does your animal have? Does it use all of its legs to move around? Does your animal have toes? How many? Does your animal hop, walk, run, or a combination of all three?
- Using playdough and figurines (or other tools), press the figurines into the playdough to create your own scene with animal tracks.
- Challenge a member of your household to identify the figurines from the tracks you made! Ask them what features of the tracks they used to guess. Then switch roles so you can guess!

DID YOU KNOW

Animal tracks can tell scientists a lot about an animal. We can learn about social behavior, like if the animal travels in groups or herds, learn information about predators and prey, or gain knowledge about the ecology of an area by identifying the many different animal tracks that appear there.

We can also learn about the ancient past when animal tracks left in soft ground harden and fossilize. This is how we are able to study dinosaur footprints!

Experiment continued on next page...



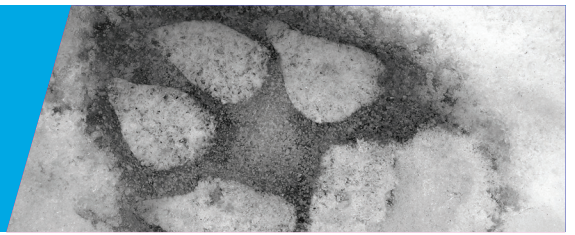
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ANIMAL TRACKS



TRY THIS

It's not always possible to find animal tracks near your home, but you may be able to find them in soft ground like mud, sand, or snow.

To begin your search, think about the animals you have seen near where you live—examples in a Pacific Northwest city might include squirrels, crows, or raccoons. Go outside with a grownup, see if you can find some soft ground where these animals spend their time, and make some observations.

If you can't find tracks, look for other evidence of animal activity. This could be a birds' nest, a burrow, or even animal poop!



Pika poop



Robin Nest & Eggs

Experiment continued on next page...

1-Bear, 2-Wolf, 3-Cougar, 4-Moose,
5-Duck, 6-Rabbit, 7-Crow, 8-Squirrel



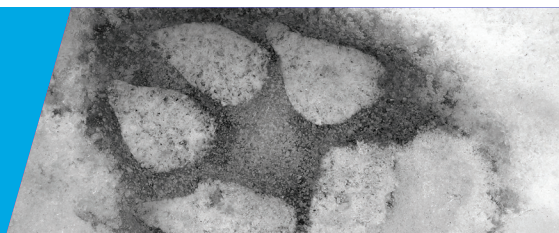
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ANIMAL TRACKS



Squirrel



Bear



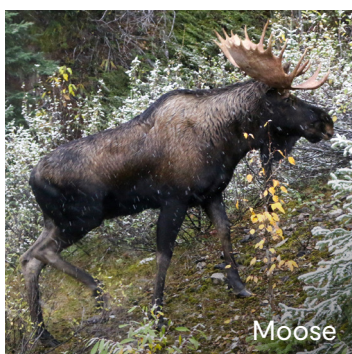
Cougar



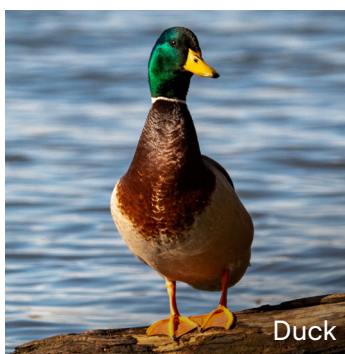
Rabbit



Wolf



Moose



Duck



Crow



1



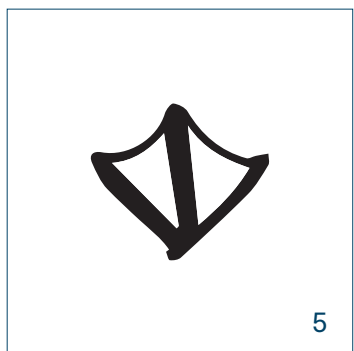
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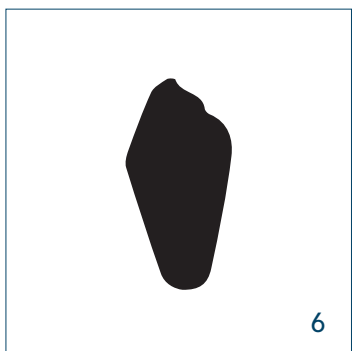
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5



6



7



8



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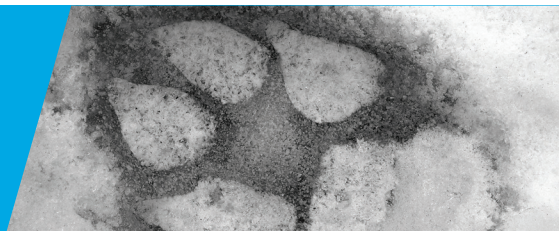
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ANIMAL TRACKS



K–2 GRADE EXPLORATION

Here are some questions you can explore together.

- How many legs does each of these animals have?
- What happens when you press harder into the playdough? Softer?
- Can you walk like a bear? Like a rabbit? Like a duck?
- What sounds does each of these animals make?
- What other animals make tracks? Can you draw what those tracks might look like?



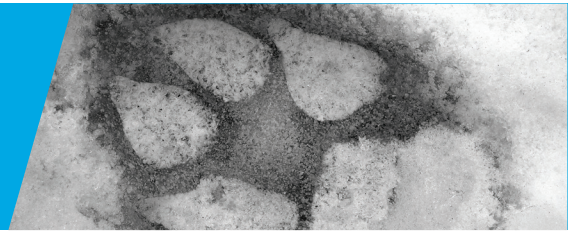
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ANIMAL TRACKS



3–5 GRADE EXPLORATION

Explore the following questions and write your observations in your science notebook.

- Draw some animal tracks in your science notebook. These could be examples from the matching game, or pictures of other animal tracks you find online or in a book. For each track, label or write down the following:
 - Number of toes
 - Claws or no claws?
 - How many legs does the animal use to move?
 - How does the animal move? Hopping? Running? Walking?
 - In what environment does this animal live?
 - Draw what you think an extended series of tracks or trail might look like for each animal.
- Draw your own track (footprint) by tracing it onto a sheet of paper. How does it compare with the other animal tracks you've observed today? What trends do you notice?
- Using a measuring tape, determine the distance between your steps—this is known as your stride length. How does your stride length change when you run compared to when you walk? What can we learn about behavior from stride length?



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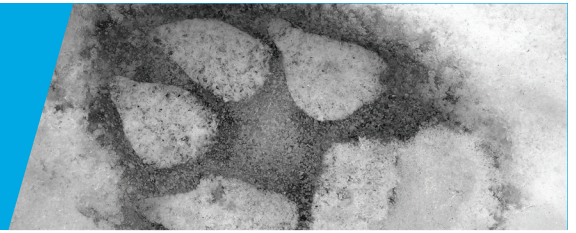
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ANIMAL TRACKS



6–8 GRADE EXPLORATION

A fossil is a piece of evidence that an organism existed in the past. We sometimes think of fossils as preserved parts of an animal, like bones, but tracks and footprints are examples of something called a trace fossil.

A trace fossil is any preserved evidence of past life left behind by an organism. Below is a table with various examples of trace fossils. Using the table below, brainstorm ideas for what scientists can learn about the organism from trace fossils left behind. Consider individual behaviors, social or group ecology, or the environment.

Trace Fossil	What can be learned
Individual footprints or tracks	
Trails of footprints or tracks	
Eggshells	
Nests	
Tooth marks	
Coprolites (fossilized animal poop)	
Gastroliths (rocks swallowed by some animals to aid in digestion)	



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