

## **Critter Basics**

### Pre-activity

**Program at Nature Station:** Nature Detectives

**Grade Level:** K – 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Program Length:**

Prep Time – 15 minutes.

Activity time – 30 + minutes

**Group size:** 5 - 30

**Setting:** Classroom or Outside

**Vocabulary and Concepts:**

- basic needs – anything an organism needs to live: air, water, food, shelter, light & living space
- habitat – an area that provides an animal or plant with adequate food, water, shelter and living space

**Materials:**

- chalkboard or easel paper
- 8 ½” x 11” sheets of red, white, blue, and green paper.
- Optional: 4 different colors of poker chips (two of each color per student)
- pictures of different habitats (deserts, prairies, forests, etc. – magazines are a great source)
- pictures of a rabbit, turtle, groundhog, frog and hawk.

**Background Information:**

All animals (including people) need food, water, shelter and space in which to live. Each specific animal requires a certain amount and quality of these needs in order to survive. These needs must also be available in a suitable arrangement that makes them easily accessible.

The purpose of this activity is for students to identify the basic survival needs of animals. This also can be used to teach how changes in habitat conditions impact an animal.

**Preparation**

Cut two 3” x 3” squares out of red, white, blue and green construction paper for each student. To save time, you could use colored poker chips. Poker chips work much better than paper if you’re doing this activity outdoors on a breezy day.

**Procedure:**

1. Introduce the term habitat to students. Explain that the places where wild animals live are their homes, or habitats. Show the students some pictures of different habitats. Tell students that animals find everything they need to survive in their habitats. Then ask the students, “What do animals need to survive?”
2. List their answers on the chalkboard or easel paper and identify the list as the basic needs of living creatures.
3. Next, tell the students that they are about to play a game called “Critter Basics.” They will pretend to be wild animals searching a habitat to find their basic needs. Take the students to the schoolyard or clear an area in the classroom. Divide the students into 4 groups and have each group stand in the corners of the classroom or similar sized play area in the schoolyard.
4. Scatter the colored squares or poker chips evenly throughout the room or play area.
5. Explain to the students that the room or playing area is their habitat: a grassy field. The different colored squares or poker chips represent an animal’s basic needs. Blue represents water. Green represents food. Red represents shelter. White represents space.
6. Each group is to pretend that they are one of four animals: a rabbit, turtle, groundhog or frog. Display the pictures of their animals. Tell them that in just a moment, you will signal them to go search and gather the squares or poker chips which represent their basic needs. You will give them one minute to gather their basic needs. Each student must gather one of EACH color in order to survive. Once they gather all four, they can return to their corner. If they don’t gather all four in one minute, they will die.
7. Explain that the students must move and act like their animals. Rabbits must hop. Turtles must walk slowly. The groundhogs waddle and the frogs leap. Hopefully, this will keep the students from running around too fast. In addition, tell them that you will be a hawk (show picture). If you see another animal (student) *running* through the field, you will swoop down, catch it, and kill it. So, the students must behave themselves and move slowly.
8. Signal them to begin and allow them to gather the squares or chips. Signal them to stop after one minute. Ask the students who gathered all four of their needs to raise their hands. They survived. Find out who didn’t get all four. They must pretend to die.
9. Gather up the squares/chips and scatter them again to repeat the game. You can simulate different environmental conditions (i.e., drought, forest being cut down, diminished food supply, etc.) by reducing the number of different colored squares/chips you distribute.

**Assessment or Evaluation:**

What are the four basic needs of animals?

What is a habitat?

How could a forest fire impact a wild animal’s basic needs?