

Quick Frozen Critters

Adapted from *Project Wild*

Purpose: Students will understand the relationship between predators and prey and the limitations that affect wildlife populations.

Materials: Food tokens (pieces of cardboard), three per student
Gym vests or other device to mark predators
Four or five hula hoops to serve as shelters (string can be used, or chalk on asphalt)

Background: Some prey animals, when threatened, will “freeze” in place, especially when a predator is close by. Fleeing to safety is an option when the predator is still a safe distance away.

Activity:

1. Select any of these following pairs of animals:

Predators

hyena

lion

crocodile

serval

Prey

dik-dik

zebra

wildebeest

zebra mouse

2. Identify one end of a gym or field as the “food source” and the other end as the “permanent shelter.”

3. Place the hula hoops in the open area between the permanent shelter and the food. These are “temporary shelters.”

4. Place the food tokens in the food source area. Allow three tokens for each prey animal.

5. Predators should be clearly identified with gym vests or safety patrol vests.

6. Use a whistle or other signal to begin each round. The prey animals should move from their shelter toward the food source, collecting one food token each trip, and returning to the permanent shelter. To survive, the prey have to obtain three food tokens. They must be alert to predators, and can alert other prey with a warning. Prey have two ways to avoid being caught by predators: they can “freeze” any time the predator is within five feet of them; or they may run for cover. Frozen prey may blink, but must otherwise remain still without talking.

7. Predators begin by standing anywhere in the open field. They must capture prey to survive, and can tag only moving prey (not “frozen” prey). Predators must capture two prey to survive. Captured prey are taken to the sidelines by the predator who captured them.

8. A time limit of five to seven minutes is suggested for each round. Play four rounds, allowing each student to be both predator and prey. Remind prey that they can remain frozen for as long as they like, but if they do not have enough food at the end of the activity, they will starve to death. In nature, an animal must sometimes balance the need for food with the conflicting need for safety.

