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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative

2012 Volume VI: Asking Questions in Biology: Discovery versus Knowledge

What Can We Learn About Animals?

Guide for Curriculum Unit 12.06.07, published September 2012

by Megan McLaughlin

"The Easter Rabbit lays Easter eggs." "My favorite animals are horses and unicorns". Young children have a natural curiosity about animals. However, they have many misconceptions and confusions about animals. The purpose of this unit is to introduce young children to the five animal classes (mammals, birds, amphibians, fish, reptiles,) and invertebrates, to learn to identify animal adaptations, and to form an idea about how or why that adaptation helps that animal to survive in its environment. They will be introduced to two great naturalists: Carl Linnaeus and Charles Darwin. The three activities in this unit are designed to introduce students to the range of biodiversity in the animal world, to encourage students to make connections between the adaptations that they see and the animal's ability to thrive in its environment, and to encourage students to form hypotheses about animal structures and behaviors. The students will become animal experts, knowing facts, adaptations, and structures of many different animals. They will use the Science Process skills of observe, predict, hypothesize, question, communicate, and investigate as they observe animal adaptations, animal morphology, and animal behavior at the Oakland Zoo.

(Developed for Science and Writing, grade 1; recommended for Science and Writing, grades 1-2)

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