



Bear Blitz

November 2019 |
Alaska Department of Fish & Game

Overview

A fast-paced set of learning stations geared for K-2 students. Students circulate through each station and engage in activities to help them learn about the natural history of bears in Alaska. Each sequence of learning stations builds on the other and is a great accompaniment to the **Bears of Alaska Kit** from Fish and Game and/or a bear and moose safety presentation.

Setup

- **Prep Time** – 30 minutes
- **Presentation Time** – Approximately 2hrs to rotate through all six stations with 5-minute transition times, and leaders at each station. Teachers could also present one station (topic) at a time over the course of several days.
- **Class Size** – Up to 60 for this model
- **Materials**
 - Paper plates
 - Colored paper (black, brown and white) cut into shapes (see example)
 - Tongue depressors
 - Glue

- Assortment of Bear books, fiction and non-fiction, for a reader station. Suggestions, '*And the Bear Snores On* or *Alaska's Three Bears*'
- Bears of Alaska Kit: secure from regional office of ADF&G or ARLIS library in Anchorage. Kit includes Smell-O'Vision activity, skulls, pelts, bear walk tarp, scat, positive tracks and large habitat photos.

Presentation

Introduction

Divide students into 6 groups, students may begin at any station. Remind students that today they are learning about Alaska's three bears--how they move and their special adaptations, both physical and behavioral.



Station 1: Bear Skulls Tell a Tale

(Skulls provided in the Bears of Alaska Kit, for more skull information go to alaska.gov/go/4P5X and check out the skull curriculum)

Students sit at a table or on the floor to avoid mishaps and mishandling of the skulls. Please be sure students do not stick their fingers up the nose hole of the skulls.

- **Eyes:**
 - **Points to ponder:** What do you notice about the eye holes of all three bears? Are they on the front of the skull or on the sides? Remember, eyes on the side, you hide. Eyes on the front, you hunt. Do our bears hunt or hide from prey?
 - **Answers:** Bears are predators, Kodiak bears are apex predators. They hunt!
- **Teeth:**
 - **Points to ponder:** Notice the bear's teeth. Sharp pointy teeth are good for tearing meat and flat teeth are better for grinding plants. Compare the skulls. Do all the bears have sharp pointy teeth AND flat grinder teeth?
 - **Answers:** Brown and Black bears are considered 'omnivores' eating both plants and meat, Polar bears are considered carnivores, eating primarily meat. Their back-triangle teeth act like scissors to slice up meat much like a dog.

- **Noses:**
 - **Points to ponder:** Look up the nose hole on each skull. What do you notice? Those tiny delicate bones are called turbinus. The more of those bones you have, the better you are at smelling. Bear noses are like dogs. Bears can smell food miles away and even can smell through ice and water. Compare all three bears. Which bear has the most turbinus. Humans have very few bones. What does that mean?

Station 2: Smell'o'vision

(Small jars with smell inserts provided in the Bears of Alaska Kit)

Students test their capacity to smell and identify the source compared a bear. Let's see how our smelling sense compares to a bear's!

- Remind students of what they have learned about bear noses. How far away can bears smell food? What is the delicate bone in their nose called?
- Tell students that we will see if we can smell as well as a bear. Although bears can smell from miles away, we will smell our items a little closer.
- Pass one smell jar around at a time. Remind students to not blurt out what they think is in the jar, they should 'keep their guess inside' until the reveal. Students can share what they think it is after everyone has smelled the jar. Repeat this process for each jar.
- If you have time do another round with the smell jars, ask students to stand up with their eyes closed and take a step away from the table. Put out one smell at a time. See if the students can smell what is in the jar.
- **Points to Ponder:** Bears can smell food miles away, depending on the wind directions and strength. Bears can smell people and other odd things. They are very curious, so if they smell a new scent, they sometimes run away or are tempted to investigate! Bears love many things that we might consider smelly. What is something smelly that we put outside every week that a bear might find interesting? (Garbage)



Station 3: Bear Coats

(Bear pelts provided in the Bears of Alaska Kit, for more fur information go to alaska.gov/go/4P5X and check out the fur curriculum)

Students explore the texture and color of bear fur. Working with a student partner they can discuss the answers to these questions. Station leader points out fur and claw qualities.

- How does a bear's fur help it survive in its habitat? Wild animals benefit from blending into their environment to hide from predators or to help them surprise their prey.
- How thick is a bear's fur? Why does it have to be so thick?
- Look closely at the claws on the black and brown bear. What is the same and what is different? Which set looks like it would help the bear climb a tree? Which one looks best for digging?
- Can you imagine which bear lives in the snow and ice? Which one mostly lives in the forest? Which one mostly lives in open spaces



Station 4: The Bear Walk

(Bear trackway tarp and bear tracks provided in the Bears of Alaska Kit, if you don't have a tarp you can make the trackway using the stencil at: www.fishwildlife.org/application/files/5515/3479/8260/Lunch_for_a_Bear.pdf)

Students learn the difference between the front and back feet of bears, how they manage their 'gait', how many toes they have, and the way their claws show up in tracks. After explaining each student goes through the bear walk individually. Students can give support to others while they wait their turn.

- When bears walk, they move their front and back paw on the same side at the same time. Let's practice! Notice this bear trackway. Show the students the difference between the front paw and the back paw.
- Explain the bear walk. Begin with your hands on the front tracks at the end of the tarp. Next, move your right hand and foot forward to match the tracks, now your left. In the middle of the tarp the bear changes what it is doing. What's happening here? The bear is standing up. Why would they do that? Sometimes bears stand to get a better view, to make themselves look bigger, or to get a better scent of 'something' on the breeze. When you get to the center, stop and stand up!

- Let's try to walk like a bear.



Station 5: Bear Masks

Pre-make: Paper Plates with tongue depressors attached.

Students use torn paper shapes and markers to create a bear mask and match their bear 'type' with the associated habitat. See sample photo. After students make their masks, they can sort themselves in front of the appropriate habitat type. See questions from fur types. Great opportunity for a photo booth!



Station 6: Bear Book Review

Gather reading level appropriate books on bears. Try to find both fiction and non-fiction for students to independently review. Not all books need to be relative to your location, as some good discussion can occur as you compare your local reality and the differences in the text. Students that require more guidance could have a book read to them. Suggest 'The Bear Snores On' to address hibernation and the fact that bears do wake up during this period. They can rouse because they didn't get enough food the season before, they are interrupted by humans or other animals, or they are tending their babies. Most go back to 'sleep' if the season hasn't changed.

Points to Ponder: How could a bear sleep all winter? Do bears wake up and why? Why don't we sleep all winter? What do bears have to do to get ready for their long winter nap?

Review with the Entire Group

How many bears does Alaska have?

If you were a Polar Bear, what would your habitat look like?

Why are black bear claws curved? How does this adaptation help them?

Are all black bears black?

Will someone demonstrate how to walk like a bear? How many toes does a bear have?

Which bear is considered a carnivore? Which are omnivores?
Do bears always hibernate ALL winter?

