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37. All About Owls

Teacher's Guide

Overview: Observe a mighty hunter by the light of the moon. Students will learn the characteristics of many types of owls as they explore their habitat, diet, and methods of hunting.

Vocabulary:

Nocturnal—Active at night.

Suggested Activities:

1. *What Did You Have for Breakfast?*

Materials needed:

owl pellets
toothpicks
paper plates
spray bottle

Allow your students to discover firsthand the diet of an owl. Purchase enough owl pellets so that students can work in pairs. First, discuss what an owl pellet is. What should the students expect to find in each pellet? (bones, fur, and skulls) Explain to your students that they can tell what an owl has eaten by identifying the type of bones found in the pellet. Reassure your students that each pellet has been sterilized and is perfectly safe to handle. Place each owl pellet on a paper plate. Spray them with water to make them easier to dissect. Give each student one or two toothpicks to use to pick through the pellet. When your students have dissected the pellet, allow them to identify the bones and skulls.

2. *On the Hunt*

Play a game to show your students how difficult it would be to find a mouse using only their sense of hearing. First, have all the students stand in a circle. They should pretend they are trees, not moving or making a sound. Pick a student to be the owl. Blindfold the student and have him or her stand in the middle of the circle. Choose a couple of students to be mice. Have them stand in the middle of the circle, too. Explain to your students that the goal is for the owl to catch a mouse by using only his or her sense of hearing. The trees are there to keep the owl from bumping into anything. The owl starts by hooting. Every time the owl hoots, the mice must respond with a squeak. The owl has to find a mouse by listening to where its voice is coming from. Once the owl catches one of the mice, pick a new owl and group of mice.

Bibliography:

George, Michael. *Owls* (Chanhassen, Minn.: Child's World, 1998) ISBN: 1567664814.

Jarvis, Kila and Denver W. Holt. *Owls: Who Are They?* (Missoula, Mont.: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1996) ISBN: 0878423362.

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Student Worksheet

Name: _____

Directions: After reading about owls, label the parts of the owl that help it find and catch its prey.

Owls are nocturnal birds. They come out at night to catch their prey. They eat mostly rodents. However, some owls will eat anything from fish to lizards.

Owls have excellent hearing and sight, which help them find their prey. They can catch a mouse in total darkness. Owls have sharp talons that help them catch and kill their prey. Their hooked beak is for tearing meat. Owls can't move their eyes like humans do. But they are able to turn their head almost all the way around.

There are many kinds of owls. The barn owl is common in Europe and North America. It is light

gray with a heart-shaped face. It lives in tree hollows and abandoned buildings. It eats rodents and can see a hundred times better in the dark than humans can!

The great horned owl doesn't build a nest of its own. Instead, it uses the nests of hawks, crows, or herons. It can catch prey three times heavier than itself. It has even been known to eat small alligators.

Most owls swallow their prey whole. Any part that they can't digest, like bones or fur, is formed into a pellet. The owl coughs up the pellet a little while after eating.

