



Squirrel Tales

Introduction

In the book *Jo MacDonald Hiked in the Woods*, author Mary Quattlebaum introduces children to the trees, plants, and creatures in a forest and models safe, courteous behavior in the wild. In this activity, children focus on the squirrel and dramatize, draw, and write about its life cycle and forest experience.

Materials Needed

- ◆ Several pieces of paper
- ◆ Colored markers or crayons

Procedure

1. Ask children to find the squirrel in every illustration in the book. What is it doing?
2. Explain that the book's pictures show the adult squirrel but that its life cycle includes several stages of growth: gestation (pregnancy of mother), live birth, baby, juvenile, and adult.
3. Show children pictures of these five stages from books or Internet. How do the kittens, juveniles, and adults move? What body parts allow them to move that way? What do they eat? (Babies, called kittens, are born hairless and with closed eyes and ears. Like other mammals, squirrels drink their mother's milk. In the juvenile stage, their eyes and ears open, they grow fur and stronger nails for tree climbing, and begin to play with their siblings and learn to survive from their mother.)
4. Have children act out the different stages (helpless baby, developing juvenile in nest, scampering adult).
5. Ask children to draw a picture of each growth stage.
6. Invite children to write and illustrate a story about the adult squirrel. What does it see in the forest? What other creatures does it meet? How does it prepare for winter?



Nature Connections

- ◆ Invite children to write and illustrate a story about a juvenile squirrel. What does it see and do in its nest? What does it see in the forest?
- ◆ Squirrels are very adaptable, meaning they can live in many places. Have kids look for squirrels and nests (called dreys) in their neighborhood and listen for their noises.
- ◆ Squirrels communicate with tail flicks and different sounds. Dr. Robert Lishak has identified several squirrel sounds. In the book, Jo hears the squirrel bark "err-err" to warn other squirrels of possible danger (predators or humans such as Jo and her grandfather). Dr. Lishak labels this the "kuk" sound of alarm. Read about Dr. Lishak's research and other squirrel sounds at http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-04-09/local/35451118_1_squirrels-cat-moves-kuk

Key Concepts

- ◆ Environments are the space, conditions, and factors that affect an individual's and a population's ability to survive and their quality of life.
- ◆ The environment must supply the needs of organisms.
- ◆ Plants and animals have life cycles.
- ◆ A life cycle includes: birth, development, adulthood, reproduction, and death.
- ◆ Offspring resemble parents.
- ◆ Each organism has different structures for different functions.



Additional Resources

- ◆ **Gray Squirrel at Pacific Avenue** by Geri Harrington