

Lesson Title: Conservation Critters

Grade Level: 4th Grade

Overview: In this integrated unit, students consult animal field guides to discover the kinds of visual and textual information available in the printed resources and discuss conservation as one approach/ environmental ethic that contributes to sustainability (Science). Once students are familiar with the structure of field guides, they'll explore Ake Larson's imaginative *Field Guide to Infrequently Found Creatures of Lake Superior* as an example of a conservationist stance toward wilderness areas, and students will understand how the love of the outdoors inspires writing, photography and sculpture. They will then build their own imaginary "Conservation Critters" out of natural found objects (Art), and write a fictional field guide entry using concepts from previous lessons (Literacy).

Benchmarks:

Science: Use encyclopedias, source books, texts, computers, teachers, parents, other adults, journals, popular press, and various other sources, to help answer science-related questions and plan investigations.

Language Arts: Use peer conferencing for writing improvement. Use correct subject/verb agreement including irregular verb forms.

Art: Explore and utilize a variety of media in carrying out the creative process in three dimensions. Learn additive sculpture techniques.

Objectives:

1. Students will identify the types of information and images used in non-fiction animal field guides (such as animal markings, habitat, distinguishing behaviors, migration patterns).
2. Students will explore the concept of conservation as an approach to maintaining the health of the natural world.
3. Students will imagine and build a three-dimensional, animal-like creature out of natural found objects, solving structural problems as they arise.
4. Students will write a creative, fictional field guide entry using complete sentences, proper noun/verb agreement and spelling, include a reference/relation to some visual aspect of the creature that they produced, and use four categories of info from non-fiction field guides.

Vocabulary: Fiction/non-fiction, field guide, conservation, 3D, additive sculpture, found object art

General Lesson Sequence:

1. Explain that people often need a range of resources in order to identify and learn about the animals that live in their yards or parks and forests. Ask where we would go look for information about animals that we observe in our back yard?
2. Pass out one animal field guide to each pair of students. Have them write down the kinds of information they find about animals – including the kind of info explained in photos, illustrations, maps, and diagrams (answers would be things like description of animal's markings, habitat, tracks or song). After they make their lists, conduct a whole group discussion and generate a class list of types of field guide info on the board. You may also want to address the term "wildlife illustrator" and compare with other types of visual artists.
3. Introduce Mark (pen name Uncle Ake) Larson's book. Explain that Mark traveled around Lake Superior three times to imagine, write and publish this book which is a fictional field guide – ask students to review difference between non-fiction and fiction.
4. Show and read scanned pages of his book using LCD projector. Discuss and highlight his photography, creative and non-invasive sculpture, and writing skills.
5. Take time to explain that Mark's book reflects a conservationist's view of nature: as artists and users of natural resources (for recreation and utilitarian uses) we must be conservative

(least invasive/disruptive) and proper in our use of natural resources and interaction with wild habitats. Ask students to offer ideas why conservation might be necessary to maintain the health of our environment, Lake Superior in particular (water pollution – health issues - over-fishing, beauty, corporate aims vs. community needs, etc.).

6. Then, say something like, “I thought Mark’s amazing imagination and creative ideas might inspire us to make our own imaginary critters -- that’s why I asked you to bring in lots of twigs, pine cones, rocks and other natural objects to make your own *three-dimensional sculptures* out of these “*found objects*” – Check for student understanding on these art terms.
7. Let’s get started with our inventions. We will follow Mark’s ground rules for creating imaginary “conservation creatures,” and a few of mine which are:
 - a. You may swap found objects with each other.
 - b. You must only use natural materials – no glue, wire, tape, etc.- to build it.
 - c. You must build it so that won’t fall apart too easily. You’ll need to work through construction problems given our conservative limitations with tools and process.
 - d. When you add pieces of material together to make art, this is called additive sculpture.
 - e. It must resemble a creature-like object in some way, shape, or form.
8. Students work for 15 to 20 minutes (you may want to have them work in pairs).
 - a. For students who finish early, give them the option to help a friend, create a different creature, or build an environment or accessories for their creatures.
 - b. The teacher will come around and photograph the artwork when students finish.

Day Two: (could be done with students’ classroom teacher, not in the art room)

1. Say “Yesterday, we had a chance to see Mark Larson’s fictitious field guide to infrequently found creatures and then created some of our own – our products are like many artists who create found-object art (could introduce Andy Goldsworthy here, too). I have 5 x 7 color photos of your creatures printed.” Also, review the students’ understanding of conservation through discussion and other examples.
2. Next, I’m asking you to write a field guide entry for the new species you made (language arts benchmarks). Go through criteria for the field guide, which are written on the board:
 - a. Select categories you discovered in the non-fiction field guides (feel free to draw maps, draw diagrams, too) and make up your own
 - b. Use complete sentences, noun/verb agreement, accurate spelling and punctuation (review if needed).
3. Once students complete their field guide entries, they will partner up, share their creature photo and check over each other’s work to ensure they both met the project’s expectations.
4. Photos plus field guide entry forms can be posted on a bulletin board or made into a “Field Guide of Conservation Critters” for the classroom library. In wrap up discussion, ask students what construction problems they ran into and how they solved the problems.

Assessment:

Did students review field guides and generate a list of types of information (visual and textual) found in the guides? • Did students build a 3D imaginary creature using only natural found objects? • Does the students’ field guide entry forms include four categories of information found in non-fiction field guides and written using complete sentences and noun/verb agreement? • Are students able to articulate the meaning of “conservation” as an approach to caring for the planet?

Materials needed: 15 – 20 natural found objects for each student, Ake Larson’s *Field Guide to Infrequently Found Creatures of Lake Superior* and power point of images from the book, age-appropriate non-fiction field guides (one for each pair of students), digital camera, field guide entry forms.

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