



Outdoor Biology Instructional Strategies

SILENT STALKING

CHALLENGE

Survive as a predator or a prey by either silently stalking and “catching” your prey, or detecting and stopping approaching predators.

BACKGROUND

A mountain lion slowly and quietly approaches a deer until it is within pouncing distance. A wading bird, such as an egret or a heron, stealthily pursues frogs and fish until a sudden thrust of the bird’s sharp bill can reach the prey. Many predators must stalk their prey to get close enough to strike without warning. The slightest noise or a sudden movement might alarm the prey and give it an opportunity to escape. The prey must remain constantly on the alert for possible dangers. A good sense of hearing and the ability to pinpoint the direction from which sound comes are important survival adaptations for many prey.

In this activity the participants take the parts of predators and prey. “Predators” must learn to move silently to “catch” the “Prey.” The prey must rely totally on their sense of hearing to detect and stop the approaching predators.

Silent stalking works best with four to eight players. If you have more than ten participants, divide them into smaller groups (of no less than four players). The game may be played during the day or night, but night games are more exciting.

MATERIALS

For day use:

- 1 blindfold or mask for each group
- 1 “Mask” Equipment Card
- Cotton or ear plugs
- 1 roll of masking tape
- Several marking pens
- Sponges
- String

For night use, add:

- 1 flashlight with fresh batteries for each group
- 1 paper cone

Optional:

Flags to mark the stalking site
Extra batteries

PREPARATION

Site: Choose a fairly open, level site (such as a lawn, forest clearing, field, or vacant lot) with a noisy walking surface. Dry leaves and other plant litter make the best stalking surfaces, but you can also use gravel, pebble beaches, and crunchy snow. Mark off a stalking circle at least ten meters in diameter for each group. The edge of each circle should be at least 40 meters away from any other circle.

Masks: OBIS has developed a simple but effective mask for this activity. (The common blindfold often invites peeking.) See the “OBIS Mask” Equipment Card in the OBIS Toolbox folio.

Flashlights and Paper Cones: Although some flashlights have a narrow beam, most flashlights must be modified for use in the nighttime version of this activity. A narrow light beam is necessary in order for pinpointing guesses to be clearly identified as hits or misses. You can use any other stiff opaque paper to make a paper cone for narrowing the light beam. Take a piece of paper and roll it into a cone from 15 – to 30-cm long. The larger opening should fit tightly over the head of the flashlight. Tape the cone to hold it together. Tape the cone on the flashlight in such a way that you obtain the narrowest spotting beam. Carrying an extra set of batteries is advisable.

ACTION

Introduce *Silent Stalking* as a predator/prey game. Define “predator” and “prey” if these terms are new to the group. A **predator** is an animal that catches and eats other animals. A **prey** is an animal that is captured and eaten by another animal. Ask the group for examples of predators that stalk their prey, such as cats, foxes, and owls.

THE SILENT STALKING GAME

Outline the game rules to the participants.

1. One member of the group is the prey; the other members are predators.
2. The prey stands in the center of the noisy walking site and puts on the mask (Ears should remain uncovered.) At night, the prey also has a flashlight.
3. The predators assemble in a circle about five to eight meters from the prey.
4. When everyone is ready, the masked prey starts spinning around while the predators walk on the perimeter of the circle around the spinning prey. After spinning about four times, the prey yells, “STOP!” Everyone, including the prey stops.
5. Now the predators silently stalk the prey. The prey protects himself by listening for the sounds of approaching predators and pinpointing them

(pointing at them with either the flashlight beam or a finger) before they can get close enough to tag him. The predators must pause between each step to see if the prey has pinpointed them. This prevents a predator from running up and tagging the prey after the predator has been pinpointed. (Since in this game the prey cannot run away, the pause takes the place of an escape response on the part of the prey.)

6. A referee (yourself or a student) judges the prey's pointing guesses. When the prey points, the referee yells "Freeze!" and everyone stops. The referee moves behind the prey, sights along the prey's pointing arm, and announces "hit" or "miss". A "hit" occurs when the prey's flashlight beam or finger points directly at or above an approaching predator. (Direction is important here, not height of guess.) "Hit" predator leave the game by moving to a designated area outside of the stalking circle. When a predator tags the prey, the referee also yells "Freeze!" and everyone stops while the successful predator moves outside of the circle. The stalking resumes when the referee yells "Stalk!" Ask the predators outside of the circle to watch the rest of the game quietly so the prey can concentrate on pinpointing the remaining predators.
7. The game ends when all the predators have tagged the prey, all the predators have been eliminated, or when the prey has used up all available detection attempts. (Each prey is given twice as many attempts as there are predators.)

Playing the Game:

When everyone understands the game, point out the stalking circle(s), select the prey, and let the stalking begin. You may want to run through a practice round. Suggest to the players that at the end of each round the predators who have been detected try to figure out what gave them away.

Game Variations:

Before playing any variation of the game, ask your group to predict the outcome.

1. Simulate a hearing loss due to injury or age by placing ear plugs or cotton in one or both of the prey's ears.
2. Play the game on several different walking surfaces: a quiet one, a noisy one, a downhill slope, or an uphill slope.
3. Have the predators and prey get down on their hands and feet to simulate four-legged animals.
4. Play the game on a windy (noisy) night.

STALKING TALK

1. Ask the participants how they would change their bodies in order to be more effective as predators or as prey.
2. Ask the most successful stalkers to demonstrate their silent-stalking skills to the rest of the group.

FOLLOW THROUGH

1. Challenge the participants to see how close they can get to a bird, cat, fish, butterfly, squirrel, or lizard. At night they could stalk night crawlers (worms), chickens, owls, frogs or raccoons.
2. Encourage the students to watch animals stalking their prey – a cat, bird (stalking insects or worms), or a friend trying to catch a fish.
3. In a camp, you might ask campers with cameras to see who can get the closest picture of a given animal. (No telephoto lenses, please!)

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Follow the Scent

Leapin' Lizards

Web It

Adaptation – Predator-Prey

Attention!

Food Chain Game

Sound Off!