

WILDLIFE TOWN HALL

Grades 7 to 8 - Large group/class

Who belongs in a city? That question will be addressed as students debate the various viewpoints humans have of living close to wildlife in urban and suburban areas.

OBJECTIVES:

- ▶ Understand the value of a variety of species within the urban ecosystem and the implications of removing any given species
- ▶ Address prejudices, myths and misconceptions about wildlife, especially maligned species (e.g. coyotes, snakes, bats)
- ▶ Identify reliable sources to learn about wildlife and the natural behaviour of wild species
- ▶ Find solutions to help people peacefully coexist with neighbourhood wildlife

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVITY

The teacher will lead a conversation about the diversity of wild species that live in urban and suburban areas. They can ask students which wild animals they have seen or heard in their neighbourhood and their views on those species – this can be based on personal beliefs, or what they have seen in the media. It may be of benefit to introduce participants to the community meeting process.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY

This activity should be undertaken in the style of a town hall meeting where members of the public provide a deputation (verbal presentation) to the decision-makers of a community (e.g. city councillors). In this activity, the “wild animals” will argue their case regarding why they are an integral part of the community. The “decision-makers” will discuss any concerns that the human community may have regarding that species.

PROCESS OF ACTIVITY

Students select whether they would like to be a “wild animal” or a “decision-maker”. The class should be evenly split between the two roles.

Wild animals: At least 2 species from Column A and at least 2 species from Column B should be selected with as many species as possible represented. One person or a small group (depending on class size) will research on behalf of one species (e.g. 2-3 students may represent coyote, while 2-3 other students may represent pigeon, etc.). Their research should focus on any complaints from people against their species, the benefits of their species (particularly within an urban environment) and their natural history (e.g. are they active during the day or at night? What do they eat? etc.). They can also investigate the problems humans are causing for their species. During their preparation, they should be able to outline why their species belongs in the city/suburbs and defend any misconceptions about their species brought up by the community/decision-makers.

Decision-makers: These are the people who will listen to the points brought forward by the wild animals and determine if they should live in a city or live elsewhere. These students should research common complaints from people against the selected species (e.g. pigeons poop on everything, coyotes might attack people, etc.) to debate with each species.

Wild Species A	Wild Species B
<p>Eastern coyote</p> <p>Red fox</p> <p>Raccoon</p> <p>Striped skunk</p> <p>Norway rat</p> <p>Rock pigeon</p> <p>Garter snake</p> <p>Big brown bat</p>	<p>Songbirds (e.g. robin, sparrow, goldfinch, etc.)</p> <p>Eastern gray squirrel</p> <p>Mallard</p> <p>Eastern cottontail</p> <p>Saw-whet owl</p> <p>Mute swan</p> <p>Peregrine falcon</p> <p>White-tailed deer</p>

To gain a deeper understanding of commonly held beliefs (true or untrue) about a species, they may opt to provide a poll or questionnaire to their peers asking for their views and compile answers as feedback from their community, or research news coverage of their species.

During the community meeting, the wild animals should debunk any common myths and

misconceptions that are brought up about their species. After each species argues their case, the decision-makers convene and decide if that species should stay in the city or if they should live elsewhere. When researching, it may be of benefit to split the decision-makers up into species teams to focus on one species.

POST ACTIVITY

Once it has been determined which species will stay and which should go, the class will reconvene for a discussion. Questions may include (depending on the outcome):

- ▶ Why did the decision-makers determine that certain species should leave the city? Was it a good decision? Were they missing any details to make a more informed decision? What may have changed their mind? Was their decision based on feelings or facts?
- ▶ What are the negative consequences of removing a particular species from the city?
- ▶ Were more animals from Column B allowed to stay? Why?
- ▶ Where do our ideas and attitudes toward wildlife come from? Are they correct? Did you learn anything new from your research?
- ▶ If all wild animals were permitted to stay in the city, why was that the case? If they belong in cities, what can people do to help them?

TIP!

Visit www.torontowildlifecentre.com/kids-go-wild/ to find supporting materials for educators for this activity including species fact sheets and information on common myths and misconceptions about wild animals.

RECOMMENDED LINKS FOR STUDENT RESEARCH:

- ▶ www.torontowildlifecentre.com/wildlife-emergency-rescue-hotline/conflicts-with-wildlife/
- ▶ www.humanesociety.org/resource/wildlife-management-solutions
- ▶ www.coyotewatchcanada.com/site/coexisting-with-coyotes
- ▶ www.toronto.ca/ext/digital_comm/mls/coyotes-in-the-urban-landscape/story_html5.html
- ▶ www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/
- ▶ www.batcon.org/about-bats/bat-profiles/
- ▶ www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/speciesguides