

# FIELD TRIP ACTIVITY GUIDE

FOR MIDDLE ELEMENTARY: GRADES 2ND-3RD

## THEME: CONNECTING WITH ANIMALS

The theme for this activity guide focuses on connecting with animals, as a way for young learners to build empathy and compassion for wildlife. Spending time with animals, observing their natural behaviors, discussing what emotions they may feel, and understanding them as a whole are all ways for children to make connections with animals. Henry Vilas Zoo recognizes empathy towards wildlife as an important building block for learning to take conservation action.

## STANDARDS

Wisconsin Standards for Science (WSS) / Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS):

- LS1.A: Structure and Function
- LS1.B: Growth and Development of Organisms
- LS1.C: Organization for Matter and Energy Flow in Organisms
- LS2.A: Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems
- LS2.D: Social Interactions and Group Behavior
- LS4.C: Adaption
- ESS2.C: The Roles of Water in Earth's Surface Processes

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through participation in this field trip, students will be able to:

- Experience affective empathy towards animals
- Apply cognitive empathy towards animals
- Practice wildlife observation skills that increase chances of positive animal interaction

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## FIELD TRIP POINTERS

Go slow! Do not expect to cover the entire zoo during your field trip. Students will have a more memorable experience by lingering longer at fewer exhibits.

Look for the Docents! The zoo often has Docents stationed at various exhibits who can help expand your discussions and tell stories that help students develop empathy for animals. Check the Zoo's website for more guidelines and recommendations for a successful field trip:

<https://www.henryvilaszoo.gov/education/school-field-trip/>

## HOW TO USE THIS ACTIVITY GUIDE

This field trip guide presents five age-appropriate activities that may be completed in any order. Teachers and chaperones are encouraged to use the guide as a reference throughout the field trip, while allowing student-directed learning to occur. Students in grades 2-3 are naturally curious. As they explore their environment, they begin to develop understandings of how the world works. By following their lead at the Zoo, you enable that important exploration process to occur. The icons on each page symbolize different best practices for developing empathy in children.

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**FRAMING  
EMPATHY**



**INCREASE  
KNOWLEDGE**



**ACTIVATING  
IMAGINATION**



**MODELING  
EMPATHY  
BEHAVIORS**



**PRACTICING  
BEHAVIORS**



**EXPERIENCE  
ANIMALS  
CLOSE UP**



# ACTIVITY 1

AREA: BIG CATS  
ANIMAL: AMUR TIGER



## GUIDING QUESTION:

What makes a tiger feel lucky?

## BACKGROUND:

Acknowledging an animal's experience, and allowing for questions about animal's perceived thoughts or feelings, can be used as launching points for a more engaged conversation that leads to empathy for the animal. Of course, we cannot know whether a tiger feels emotions the same way we do, but having students think about luck in the context of survival techniques can help them feel empathy towards this massive predator.

As the world's largest cats (males weigh up to 700 pounds; females up to 400 pounds), you would think that Amur tigers rule the forests where they live. However, even big animals can struggle to survive.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Look at the Wheel of Survival to see what challenges big cats face when hunting. Then have students take turns spinning the wheel to see how lucky a big cat they are. Ask them how they feel with their outcome. Would their big cat want to try again? If their big cat was unlucky with hunting, what else could they do that day that might make them feel lucky again? Engaging in dialogue that requires students to take the perspective of the animal helps them build empathy. Encourage students to talk about whether the tigers at the Zoo feel lucky around feeding time. Why or why not?



## LITERARY LINK

"The eye of the tiger" has been used to describe intense focus and confidence, especially related to physical determination. The phrase "eye of the tiger" refers to the fierceness and strength of a tiger when it is hunting. Before a tiger attacks its prey, its ears turn forward, revealing spots on the back of each ear. These "eye spots" can indicate imminent attack.

# ACTIVITY 2

AREA: PRIMATE HOUSE  
ANIMAL: RING TAILED LEMURS OR  
BLACK & WHITE RUFFED LEMURS




**GUIDING QUESTION:**  
How do lemurs use body language?

## BACKGROUND

By moving like an animal moves, young learners experience “kinesthetic empathy,” which helps them better understand an animal’s intentions and develop empathy for them. Just like kids, lemurs are nimble and expressive with their bodies, making this exhibit a good place for practicing kinesthetic empathy.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Share some lemur facts, depending on the species that is on exhibit during your visit:

- Black and white ruffed lemurs often hang upside down from their tails.
- When ring-tailed lemur troops travel throughout their home range, they keep their tails raised in the air, like flags, to keep group members together. 

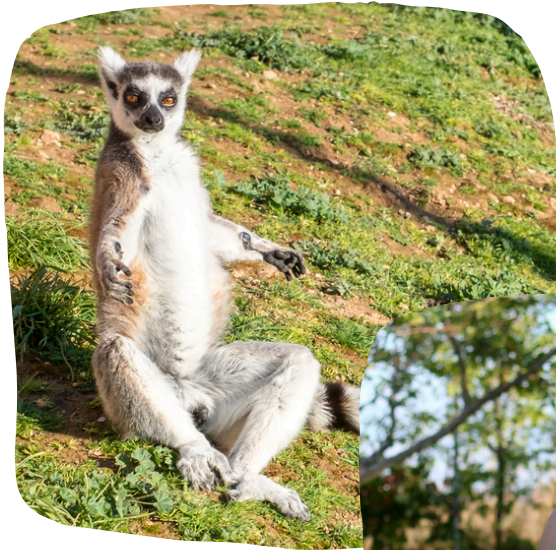
How does this group stay together during our field trip? (name tags, buddy system, etc.)

- Ring-tailed lemurs love to sunbathe and nap in “yoga positions,” like tucking the nose between the hind legs and curling the tail up over its back.

Then invite the students to try having a conversation upside down, and/or raise a “tail” in the air and travel in a group, and/or perform lemur yoga poses using the example here - or they can invent their own!

## EXHIBIT ELEMENT

Want more lemur fun? The lemur leaf frogs at the Discovery Center and Herpetarium are unique amphibians because they can bask in the sun for extended periods of time without drying out. It is believed they are able to do this due to a pigment in their skin called pterorhodin, which reflects heat off the surface of their skin. Unlike the primates after which they are named, lemur leaf frogs don’t do much leaping. They move very slowly, walking hand over hand and rarely jump unless fleeing from danger.



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# ACTIVITY 3

AREA: CHILDREN'S ZOO POLLINATOR GARDEN  
ANIMAL: MONARCH BUTTERFLY



## GUIDING QUESTION:

How is milkweed important throughout a monarch butterfly's life?

## BACKGROUND:

It is important to provide opportunities for children to care for animals in ways that require accessing empathy. The Pollinator Garden showcases a simple way that kids can help monarch butterflies, by caring for plants that are essential to monarch caterpillars and to migrating adult butterflies.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Have the group stand still and be quiet for 30 seconds to look and listen for wildlife. Ask students: What animals can live here at the zoo that are not in enclosures?

Look around the Pollinator Garden to identify milkweed and other flowering plants. Milkweed is where monarchs lay their eggs, so that the baby caterpillars can feed on this important plant when they hatch. By feeding on the toxin-containing milkweed, monarchs become poisonous to predators. Ask students about their favorite foods and if they would be happy eating only that one food.

Nectar-producing flowers, including milkweed, provide energy for adult monarchs during their long migration. Every year, hundreds of millions of monarch butterflies migrate from the United States and Canada to Mexico (up to 2,500 miles) for the winter. Driving that far in a car would take about 36 hours. Can you imagine taking that trip? Could it be done without stopping or would you need to take breaks to eat, refuel the car and use the bathroom? As a butterfly making the trip, you can see why having waystations to feed and rest would be important, too!

In addition to the Pollinator Garden, Henry Vilas Zoo has a monarch waystation on the hill behind the Aviary. Encourage students to think about establishing a monarch waystation in an outdoor space near home or school.



The broad leaves and thick stem of milkweed are very robust and are covered with a thin, light-gray down. The plant is light green with purplish-pink flowers arranged in a rounded cluster

## CAREER CALL OUT

Biologists at Henry Vilas Zoo partnered with scientists at the University of Kansas who organize the Monarch Watch program to create, conserve, and protect monarch butterfly habitats. MonarchWatch.org has resources for teachers, families, researchers, and hobbyists who want to get involved.



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# ACTIVITY 4

AREA: TUNDRA BUGGY (ARCTIC PASSAGE)  
TOPIC: POLAR RESEARCH



## GUIDING QUESTION:

What does it take to explore the arctic tundra?

## BACKGROUND:

Young learners can develop empathy not just for animals, but for the people who help the animals. The arctic tundra, is an important ecosystem for many wildlife species and thinking about how scientists study these extreme habitats can help students feel more connected to the story and the work that goes into protecting the wildlife who live there.

## INSTRUCTIONS:

Gather students around the Tundra Buggy. Explain that this was a refurbished vehicle actually used in arctic research and exploration. Ask the students, what do they think researchers need to be able to study polar bears in such remote locations? Why is it important for researchers to go look for polar bears? Let students explore and pretend that they are arctic researchers.

Really allow students to pretend and play. Giving prompts to students to keep them engaged in being on the tundra buggy crew. Reinforce the idea that research an important part of understanding and protecting animals. Discuss with students what other animals would thrive in the arctic. Think about the different ways we can study animals without interrupting them or disturbing their habitat.



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