Ben Hess, Collections Manager

North Carolina Museum of Natural Science

Podcast length: 15:59

THE walking classroom
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LESSON PLAN

SYNOPSIS

The Walking Classroom's Laura Fenn gets to know Ben Hess, the Collections Manager of Mammals at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Science. Ben shares about how he studies collections of shrews in order to research and learn more about northern and southern short-tail shrews in North Carolina.

VOCABULARY

Review key vocabulary (included definitions are limited to the context of today's podcast)

- **mammalogist:** (noun) a scientist that studies mammals
- **shrew:** (noun) a small mouse-like mammal with a long pointed snout and tiny eyes that eats insects
- **research collection**: (noun) a group of preserved specimens that are often kept in museums for researchers to study
- **species:** (noun) a group of closely related organisms that share similar characteristics.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT & DISCUSSION

1. Ben Hess explained that by examining old specimens scientists can learn a lot about a species, like what they ate. He also said that studying these specimens helps us better understand what the environment was like at that time. Why is it important to understand what the world and environments were like in the past?

2. Ben Hess talked about species and subspecies. In his example, the species he was examining was the shrew and some subspecies were the elephant shrew, northern shrew, southern shrew, etc. Another example would be the species is an elephant and some subspecies are the Indian Elephant, Asian Elephant, African Elephant, etc. Can you think of another species and then list some subspecies?

3. Ben Hess shared that a great way to find out if being a mammalogist or a collections manager would be a good career choice is to try it out by volunteering. Do you think it's important to try out a job before you choose a career? What about a sport or a club? Why or why not?

BOOK SUGGESTIONS

Consider reading aloud or making some of these titles available to students to reinforce and extend some of the concepts covered in today's podcast.

Animalian (Welcome to the Museum) **by Jenny Broom**
This book mimics the experience one has when visiting a natural history museum through its gallery-style illustrations and accompanying descriptions.

Bone Collection: Animals **by Rob Scott Colson**
In the style of a scientist's notebook, this book introduces readers to the bone structure of animals and helps make the connection that while their may be differences in animal skeletons, many similarities exist too.

The Animal Book **by Steve Jenkins**
Fascinating facts, rich illustrations and engaging infographics introduce readers to over 300 different animals throughout seven topical chapters.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The following activities are ways to build on and extend some of the topics discussed in the podcast. We strongly encourage you to always preview videos prior to showing them to your students.

Classification Schemes **http://bit.ly/1NRPfa1**
Lesson plan from Utah Education Network
Students sort organisms into classifications and provide support for their reasoning.

What is a Mammal? **http://bit.ly/1Hiz2ZL**
Lesson plan from Discovery Education
Students will develop an understanding of the characteristics of a mammal, differences amongst mammals and apply what they have learned. Great extension activities are included.

Eurasian Water Shrew **http://bit.ly/1frCRTx**
Video Clip from BBC's Life of Mammals series (1:41)