

Critter Crawl

Students compete as teams in a relay race. The first student in each line moves like the assigned animal to advance to each station. Each student completes the course. For older students, add a free station where each student can choose an animal movement.

Station 1 – slither like a snake

Station 2 – hop like a bunny

Station 3 – fly like a bird (flap arms)

Station 4 – walk like an elephant (legs straight, arms straight – extended in front)

Station 5 – gallop like a horse

Thumper in the Thicket

Arrange hula hoops across the playing area. Divide students into two groups: rabbits and foxes. Rabbits start on one side of the playing field and the foxes on the opposite side. At a signal the rabbits hop to the safe place (hula hoop) before getting tagged by a fox; there can only be two rabbits per safe place. If tagged by a fox, they become a fox. At the end of each round a safe place (hula hoop) is removed. Continue removing safe places until one remains.

Deer Tag

Select 2-4 students to be hunters. The remaining students are deer in a forest. Hunters are positioned across the play area. Deer start at one end of the “forest” and try to get to the other side without being tagged by a hunter. As deer are tagged, they become hunters. As an extra challenge, include restrictions on how the hunters can tag the deer (e.g. right hand only, one hand behind their back, hopping on one foot).

For older students, partition the play area in fourths or halves. Limit the number of hunters allowed in each area.

Migration Maze

Students are migratory birds traveling between nesting habitats and wintering grounds. Divide the playing area into three areas: one end - nesting habitat; middle - Iowa stopover (safe zone); other end - wintering grounds. Place 1 carpet square per 2 students throughout the Iowa stopover (middle area). Students start in the nesting habitat and “fly” (flap their arms) like birds as they race to the Iowa stopover. In the stopover area, they must have at least one foot on the carpet square; only 2 students can be on each carpet square. Students who are left without a carpet square are out and must wait on the sidelines. Students then “fly” to the wintering grounds. Remove a carpet space from the Iowa stopover. Students fly back through the Iowa stopover on their way to the nesting habitat. Repeat rounds (flying from nesting habitat to Iowa stopover to wintering grounds and back). Remove a carpet square every time the students leave the Iowa stopover.

Snake Tag

Designate one student as the snake tamer. Arrange the remaining students into groups of three or four. Each group forms a snake by holding onto the waist of the student in front of them. The student in front is the head of the snake and the student in back is the tail. Snakes must twist and turn to keep from losing their head. The snake tamer tries to catch the tail of one of the snakes and attach to it. If the snake tamer successfully attaches to a snake, the head must come off and become the new snake tamer.

Wildlife Charades

Give each student a slip of paper and ask him/her to write down a name of an animal they see in their backyard or on the playground. Put the slips of paper into a hat. One at a time, each student pulls a slip of paper from the hat. He/she must act out how that animal moves, looks, or acts in nature, while the other students try to guess what kind of animal it is. There can be no sounds, only actions.

For younger students, cut out pictures of wildlife commonly found in Iowa and have the kids pull out a picture and imitate that animal. This could also be a group activity. Students could work as teams and together act out the animal while the other team guesses what kind of animal it is.

Owl Eyes

You need sharp eyes to be successful at this game. Students stand in a circle, facing in, to the center. Select one student to be the owl. The owl stands in the middle of the circle holding a bandana. He/she puts the bandana on the ground in the center of the circle; he/she can't cover up the bandana in any way, such as sitting on it, standing on it, etc. Students standing around the circle try to grab the bandana and return to the outside of the circle without being tagged by the owl. If a student is tagged, he/she must go back to the outside of the circle and start again. If a student successfully returns to the outside of the circle with the bandana, he/she becomes the owl.

Leap Frog

Mark off two parallel lines (using chalk, masking tape, or rope) two to three feet apart to create a stream. For large groups, create several streams to keep all students active. Students line up on both sides of the stream, facing each other (towards the middle). Outside of the lines are the "banks of the stream" and the middle is "in the stream." The leader will call out one of two commands: "in the stream" or "on the bank." Students must leap like frogs according to the command. If a player follows the wrong command, they must sit out. The leader can repeat the command "in the stream" while players are in the stream and if any student moves, they are out of the game. To add further challenge, the leader can give false commands like the "in the lake" or "in the ocean." Students should only move to the commands "in the stream" or "on the bank."

One Fish, Two Fish

Designate 2 students as ducks. The remaining students are fish. Fish are scattered throughout the pond. When the music begins the fish "swim" around the pond. The ducks waddle around trying to tag the fish. If a fish is tagged he/she becomes a duck and tries to tag the fish. When the music stops all fish must freeze. The ducks continue to waddle around trying to tag the frozen fish. If a frozen fish moves while the music is stopped, he/she becomes a duck. When the music starts again, fish begin to swim. Continue until 2 fish remain. You can repeat the game with the last 2 fish becoming the new ducks.

Pheasant Hunt

Students form a line alternately facing in opposite directions in a squatting position. The first student in line is the "pheasant" and may run around the line in either direction. The last student is the "fox." The fox must run around the line in the same direction he/she starts, trying to catch the "pheasant." The "fox" can step into line behind a player, tap his/her shoulder, and change places with him/her. When the "pheasant" is caught, the "fox" becomes the "pheasant" and the tagged "pheasant" gets in line opposite from the "fox" starting end. A new "fox" starts the chase anew.

The Hungry Caterpillar

Scatter small balls or cones across the play area. Divide students into small groups. Each group is a hungry caterpillar searching for food. The first student in each group is the caterpillar's head and the remaining students are the body. The last student carries a ball bag. Caterpillars must travel around the play area in single file, holding onto the student in front of them. Each caterpillar must collect as much food (balls) as possible within the time limit (30 sec - 120 sec). Only the head of the caterpillar can guide the body and only the head can pick up the food (one at a time) and pass it back through the body. The food must be passed to each student down the line (as in relay) to where it is collected in the caterpillar's stomach (ball bag). To increase difficulty, designate a specific method in which the food must be passed (e.g., using left hand only, passing to the rear over the head, under the legs).

Robin's Egg

Select 1 student to be the robin. Have the robin sit with his/her back to the other students, at least ten feet away. Place a plastic egg behind the robin. The robin needs to protect the egg. The remaining students take turns sneaking up behind the robin and try to steal the egg. If the robin hears the person sneaking up, he/she will "call" and then turn around. If the robin catches a student, that student becomes the new robin. If there is no student when the robin "calls," the robin remains the robin and the game starts again.

Flower Power

Students pretend to be pollinators traveling from flower to flower. Scatter hula hoops across the play area (fewer hula hoops than students). Place a card with a shape inside each hula hoop (flower). Give each student a card with a shape. Students must travel around the play area, matching their card to one inside a flower. When they find a match, they stand inside the flower. Only one student can be inside each flower. If a student doesn't "pollinate" a flower, they are out. Remove a flower (hula hoop) after each round.

Metamorphosis Relay

Students are butterflies racing through their various life stages. Divide students into two teams. Students begin the race in a curled up position to represent an egg.

Station 1 – the caterpillar: students wiggle through a maze, searching for food

Station 2 – the chrysalis: students climb into a burlap sack and race to the next station

Station 3 – the adult caterpillar: students grab a colorful scarf and "flies" to the finish line

Bat Flight

Students form 2 lines ten feet apart, facing inward. Select 2 students to be bats. The blindfolded bats begin at opposite end in the middle area between the lines. Each bat travels to the other side, saying "beep, beep." If the bats bump into each other, they call "bat." If a bat bumps into a student in line, the bat calls "tree."

How Many Coyotes Can Live in this Forest?

Students are coyotes collecting food to survive. For a group of 25 – 30 coyotes, spread 25 each of 4 colors (green, blue, yellow, red) of rubber bands throughout the playing area. Each color of rubber band represents a different food in the coyote's diet (green – plants; blue – cottontail rabbits; yellow – mice; red – deer). Place a plastic bag at the start line for each student. Students must gallop through the play area, pick up one colored rubber band, gallop back to the start line, put the rubber band in their plastic bag, and gallop back to collect more food. Students can pick up only one rubber band at a time.

Continue until all the rubber bands have been collected. Have each student count how many of each color rubber band they collected in their bags. In order to survive, each coyote needs to have 7 green rubber bands, 7 blue rubber bands, 6 yellow rubber bands, and 2 red rubber bands.

Protect Your Harvest

Place 4 hula hoops in each corner of the playing area (make sure there is room around each side of the hula hoops for the students to move around them in a safe manner). Choose 4 students to be squirrels. Place a bucket in the middle with four bean bags. Each squirrel grabs a bean bag from the bucket and places it inside one of the hula hoops. Squirrels must stand outside the hula hoop and guard their nut (bean bag). The rest of the class moves around the hula hoops, trying to steal the nuts. Squirrels try to tag the thieves and stop them from stealing their nut. If a thief is tagged, he/she must move to the next hula hoop. If a thief successfully steals the bean bag without being tagged, he/she becomes the new squirrel. The old squirrel joins the rest of the class and tries to steal the nuts.

Nature Boogie

Students work in small groups. Show students pictures of plants and animals commonly found in Iowa. As a group, students chose plants and animals and create a series of dance movements (e.g., horse trot, dog shake, bunny hop, frog leap, cat pounce, snake slither, grapevine). Groups perform their dance for the class. For older students, encourage groups to incorporate music into the dance routines.

Nature Scavenger Hunts

Scavenger hunts are a great way to get kids outside exploring nature. These hunts can be general (find natural items off a list) or very specific such as matching a given shape to something found in nature or giving each child a paint swatch and asking them to match the natural color to an object in nature. You could also include textures by having students match the texture of their clothes to their natural object.

A fun variation from collecting items in a plastic or paper bag, is to wrap a piece of tape around each child's wrist (sticky side up). As they collect flowers, leaves, etc. they stick in on the tape and create a fun bracelet. For a fun extension, complete the same scavenger hunt in different seasons.

To help strengthen observation skills focus on a specific theme for your scavenger hunts (e.g. flowers, trees, wildlife, animal homes, animal tracks). Students can work in teams and compare findings.

Tree Trunk Shuffle

Arrange carpet pieces (1 less than the number of students) in a circle. Alternating students are assigned names of Iowa native trees (e.g., hickory, cedar, boxelder, maple, oak, walnut). One student is chosen as a "caller" and stands in the middle of the circle. The "caller" yells out the name of one or more trees and those students assigned that tree/trees must move to a new carpet square. The student left without a carpet square becomes the new "caller." If the "caller" yells out "Tree Trunk Shuffle," all students must move to a new carpet square.

Plant a Tree Relay

Students race to complete the task of planting a tree.

Station 1 – dig the hole: students put on a straw hat and perform 5 squats

Station 2 – plant the tree: students put on a pair of work gloves and perform 5 jumping jacks

Station 3 – move mulch: students put a small trash can on a scooter and push it to the next station; if the trash can falls off, they must go back and try again

Station 4 – water the tree: students pick up a jumping rope (represents water hose) and must jump rope to the finish line

Watch it Grow!

Plant flowers, a tree, or a garden. There are plenty of jobs to keep everyone active: digging holes, planting the tree/flowers, moving mulch, carrying water pails. Encourage parents and local community members to join in on the fun. Students will have fun watching their plants/trees change through the seasons.

Gardening Obstacle Course

You need a large outside play area. For older kids, have two teams race against each other.

obstacle 1 – carry 3 (numbers can be adjusted to age of students) bags of dirt to 3 marked planting sites

obstacle 2 – load 3 (numbers can be adjusted to age of students) bags of mulch into a wheel barrow

obstacle 3 – push loaded wheel barrow through curvy path (for added challenge, include a hill)

obstacle 4 – unload the bags of mulch

obstacle 5 – load wagon with produce

obstacle 6 – push wagon to produce stand

obstacle 7 – unload produce

obstacle 8 – climb the fence (stack of hay bales) – finish line

Build a Nest

Students are robins building their nests. Divide the students into two relay teams. Each team stands single file behind the starting line. Place 2 buckets of wet mud (1 for each team) and the end of the course. Place 2 small containers (1 for each team) at the starting line. Give each student a plastic spoon. The first student “flies” to the bucket of mud, scoops up a spoonful of mud, flies back to the starting line, and empties their spoon of mud into the container (nest). Continue until all students have helped build the nest.

Dig a Hole

Divide students into teams. Place a bucket of soil and 10 plastic cups in front of each line. Place an empty bucket at the end of the line. The first student in each line fills a cup with soil and passes it to the student behind them. Students continue passing the cup until it reaches the last student. The last student empties the cup into the bucket. Continue until all the dirt has been transferred.

Slippery Ice

Students are deer trying to cross a frozen pond. Divide students into 4 equal teams. Place one jump rope as the starting line & another as a finish line. Place two carpet squares in front of each team. Each team stands single file behind the carpet squares. The first student in line moves to the second square.

Keeping both feet on the carpet, he/she reaches around and picks up the square behind him/her. He/she places it in front and steps forward repeating the process. When he/she gets to the finish line, he/she picks up both squares and runs back to the starting line, placing the carpet for the next student in line. Continue until all members of each team have successfully crossed the frozen pond

For older students, this can be a group activity. Give each team five carpet squares. They must use these to get their entire herd (team) across the frozen pond. If a deer (student) falls, they must go back to the starting line and try again.

Snowball Tag

Mark off a play area with cones (snowball fight area). Place several mats in a nearby area (snow angel area). Give each student two yarn balls. Scatter extra yarn balls in the "snow fight" area. Students have a "snowball fight" by throwing the yarn balls at each other below the knees. Students may not hold more

than 2 snowballs at a time. If a student is hit by a "snowball," he/she must go and make a "snow angel" where the mats are located.