



Storytellers of the Land

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Fifth Grade Interdisciplinary
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How do humans tell stories about nature? How do scientists use data to tell stories?

In Storytellers of the Land, fifth graders read and wrote origin stories about animals and nature and teamed up with local conservation organizations to analyze thousands of trail camera photos of local wildlife.

In collaboration with a local conservancy and river park, students were able to serve as citizen scientists as they helped land managers and conservation biologists identify and catalog local wildlife through camera trap photo analysis. With the help of rangers and biologists, students were taught field techniques for animal tracking and how data is used to make decisions about land use and animal conservation.

At the same time, students were exploring Pourquoi stories or origin stories that many cultures throughout history have used to explain why things are the way they are, such as “Why the Snake Has No Legs,” or “How the Raccoon Got its Mask.”

To launch the project, fifth graders visited the river park and met the rangers who would be their partners. They learned how to track animals in the field and how data from cameras helps in this process. The rangers explained why it was important to know how the animals were behaving in the park, and how they were being impacted by human activity. They also explored technology used by rangers and scientists, such as GPS markers and the application iNaturalist to identify plants and animals.

Exhibition

Students held an exhibition at school, with staff, volunteers, and board members from the river park and conservancy as well as family members attending. Each team displayed their research on posters and also gave oral presentations. Their Pourquoi stories and books were displayed. Students also created a process display illustrating their learning process and the various stages of their research.