

Learning Guide



Skunks

We hope you enjoyed learning all about the often misunderstood but very lovable skunks. Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen:

Check your knowledge before and after listening to the episode by determining if statements are TRUE or FALSE.

Vocabulary

Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.3

Writing Prompts and Extension Projects

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.8

Skunk Myth vs. Fact Sort

NGSS: K-2-LS1-1 & 2-LS4-1; VA:Cr2.1.K-2

Skunk Species Match

CCSS: RI.K-2.1 & RI.1.7 / RI.2.7; NGSS: 2-LS4-1

Creature Cards

NGSS: K-2-LS1-1; CCSS: RI.2.1 / RI.3.1 & RI.2.7 / RI.3.7; VA:Cr2.1.K-3

Warning Color Art

NGSS: 1-LS1-1 & 3-LS4-2; CCSS: SL.1.4 / SL.2.4; VA:Cr2.1.K-2

Skunk Publicity Project

NGSS: 3-LS4-3; CCSS: W.2.2 / W.3.2, W.2.1 / W.3.1, & RI.2.1 / RI.3.1; VA:Cr2.1.K-3

Design a Skunk Habitat!

NGSS: K-2-LS1-1; VA:Cr2.1.K-3

Smell Science: Olfactory Fatigue

NGSS: 2-PS1-1 / 2-LS4-1; CCSS: W.2.8 / W.3.8

Additional Resources and Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio



Get Set to Listen

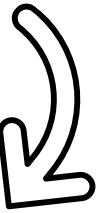
1. Before listening!

Read each statement and write TRUE or FALSE based on what you already know.



2. After listening!

Based on what the experts said in the episode, write TRUE or FALSE.



Before Listening	TRUE or FALSE?	After Listening
	1. Skunks are rodents.	
	2. Skunks live only in the United States.	
	3. All skunks have rabies.	
	4. Baby skunks are unable to spray.	
	5. Tomato juice permanently removes skunk spray odor.	
	6. Skunks use their black-and-white coloring as a warning to predators.	
	7. Skunks hibernate through the winter.	

What did you learn?



Get Set to Listen

Answer key

1. FALSE. Skunks are carnivores (and omnivores in diet) and belong to their own family, *Mephitidae*.
2. FALSE. Skunks are found throughout the Americas, from South America to Canada.
3. FALSE. Skunks can get rabies if exposed, but not all skunks have it.
4. FALSE. Even skunks as young as three days old can spray, though it's weaker.
5. FALSE. It only masks the smell temporarily due to olfactory fatigue.
6. TRUE.
7. FALSE. They enter torpor, not true hibernation, and can wake up easily.



Vocabulary

Listening for Words

1. Make a four-column chart and label the columns “I don’t know,” “I’ve seen or heard, but don’t know the meaning,” “I think I know the meaning,” and “I know the meaning.”
2. Write the vocabulary word in the column that describes how well you know the meaning of the word.
3. Listen to [the episode](#). Note how the speaker uses the words.

Matching Words with Definitions

1. Print and cut apart the word and definition cards.
2. Spread out the word cards so you can see them all. One by one, attach a definition card to each word card.

Writing with New Words

After working with the words and definitions, write a one-page essay or story that uses at least three of the words.

mephitologist

A scientist who studies skunks.

scent glands

Special glands near a skunk’s tail that produce the smelly spray used for defense.



Vocabulary

neutralize

To stop something from harming or having an effect, to make it neutral.

sulfur

A chemical element that gives skunk spray its strong, rotten-egg smell.

olfactory fatigue

When the nose gets tired of a strong smell and stops noticing it as much.

torpor

A state where an animal slows its body and metabolism to save energy, especially during cold weather.



Vocabulary

carnivore

An animal that eats only meat.

omnivore

An animal that eats both plants and animals.

habitat

The natural place where an animal lives.

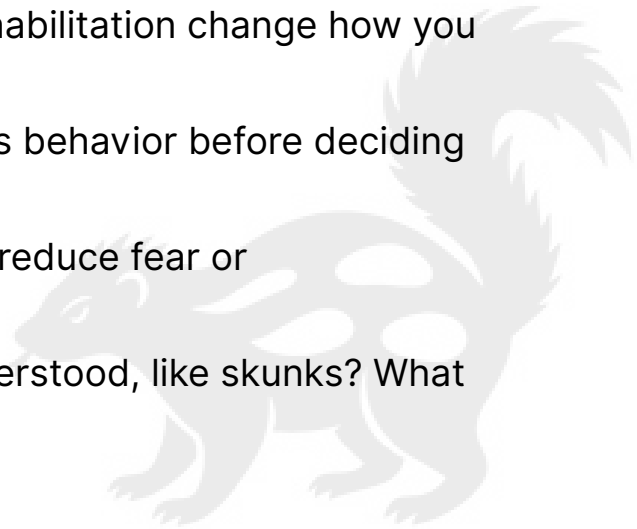
range

The geographic area where an animal species is found.



Discussion Questions

1. How does a skunk's black-and-white coloring help keep it safe?
2. What surprised you most about how skunks spray and why?
3. Skunks are omnivores. How does eating many different foods help them survive in different environments?
4. Why do you think skunks are more likely to live near people than some other wild animals?
5. Why do skunks have a bad reputation, and how does this show challenge that idea?
6. Do you think skunks would make good pets? Why or why not?
7. How did learning about baby skunks and rehabilitation change how you feel about skunks?
8. Why is it important to understand an animal's behavior before deciding how to deal with it?
9. How can learning accurate information help reduce fear or misunderstandings about animals?
10. What other animals do you think are misunderstood, like skunks? What could people learn about them?



Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner's answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group's ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Writing Prompts

Narrative Prompts

1. Write a short story about a spotted skunk that scares off a predator using a handstand.

Extensions:

- Describe how the predator reacts.
- Illustrate the scene and label what's happening.

2. Write a story about finding a baby skunk and getting help from a wildlife expert.

Extension: Explain why the skunk must return to the wild.

Informative/Explanatory Prompts

1. Explain how skunks use spray, warning colors, and behavior to stay safe.

Extension: Compare skunk defenses to another animal's defense.

2. Use what you learned in [The Children's Hour's "Skunks" episode](#) and the resources in our *Additional Resources* section to write a short speech, flyer, or video to teach others how and why it's important to live peacefully with skunks. (See the "Skunks Publicity Project" page in this Learning Guide.)

3. Explain what skunk spray is made of and why it lasts so long.

Extension:

- Do the "Smell Science: Olfactory Fatigue" experiment in this Learning Guide.
- Explain why tomato juice doesn't really work.

4. Write a "Skunk Advice Column" in which you write advice from the perspective of a skunk answering human questions (e.g., "How do I keep my dog from getting sprayed?").

Extension: Turn responses into a class book.

Opinion/Persuasive Prompts

1. Do you think of skunks as pests that need to be removed, or as creatures that should be protected?

Extension: Explain your argument to someone who may disagree with you.

2. Write an opinion explaining whether skunks should be kept as pets.

Extension: Explain what a skunk needs to live well.

- Address the opposite point of view.



Skunk Myth vs. Fact Sort

Listen

- [Part 1: What is a Skunk?](#)
- [Part 2: What Makes Skunks Stink?](#)

Test Your Knowledge

Cut out and sort these cards into “Skunk Myth” or “Skunk Fact.”

Write

your own new myths and correct them with facts. Trade with a partner to see if they can tell which are myths and which are facts.

Skunks always give off a strong stink, which warns predators to stay away.

Skunks don’t stink all the time! They spray a smelly liquid only when they’re scared, and then you’re the one who smells, not the skunk.

All skunks have rabies.

Just like many other animals, such as dogs, it is possible that skunks become infected with rabies, but it does not occur naturally, and not every skunk has it.

Skunks are carnivores, which means they eat only other animals.

Although they are categorized as *Carnivora*, skunks are actually omnivores. Along with small animals, they also eat bugs, plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables.



Skunk Myth vs. Fact Sort

If you or your pet gets sprayed with a skunk, you should soak in a bath of tomato juice to remove the smell of skunk spray.

Tomato juice doesn't actually get rid of skunk smell—it just covers it up for a little while. The best way to remove skunk spray, especially from pets, is a mix of hydrogen peroxide, baking soda, and shampoo, making sure to avoid the eyes.

Write your own skunk myth here.

Debunk your skunk myth with facts here.

Write your own skunk myth here.

Debunk your skunk myth with facts here.

Extension: Reputation Rehab Poster

Create a poster titled "Skunks: The Truth" to correct misunderstandings.

Display your poster in hallways or share it with families.





Skunk Myth vs. Fact Sort

Answer Key

myth

Skunks always give off a strong stink, which warns predators to stay away.

All skunks have rabies.

Skunks are carnivores, which means they eat only other animals.

If you or your pet gets sprayed with a skunk, you should soak in a bath of tomato juice to remove the smell of skunk spray.

fact

Skunks don't stink all the time! They spray a smelly liquid only when they're scared, and then you're the one who smells, not the skunk.

Just like many other animals, such as dogs, it is possible that skunks become infected with rabies, but it does not occur naturally, and not every skunk has it.

Although they are categorized as *Carnivora*, skunks are actually omnivores. Along with small animals, they also eat bugs, plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables.

Tomato juice doesn't actually get rid of skunk smell—it just covers it up for a little while. The best way to remove skunk spray, especially from pets, is a mix of hydrogen peroxide, baking soda, and shampoo, making sure to avoid the eyes.



Skunk Species Match

Listen

- [Part 1: What is a Skunk?](#)
- [Part 2: Types of Skunks](#)

Match

the images of skunk species with the descriptions below.



Striped skunks have a white “V” down the back and a white bar between the eyes running from the forehead to the middle of the rostrum (snout).

Spotted skunks are not truly spotted, but have a series of stripes, which are interrupted, running down the back and sides of the animal.

Hooded skunks have three typical color patterns: 1) two stripes running down the side of the body; 2) a single stripe running down the back from the forehead to the tail; or 3) a combination of both. These skunks also have a white bar between the eyes.

Hog-nosed skunks have either a single solid white stripe down the back or a double stripe in the “V” pattern seen in striped skunks. These skunks do not have any markings between the eyes. What makes them stand out most is the shape and color of their nose.

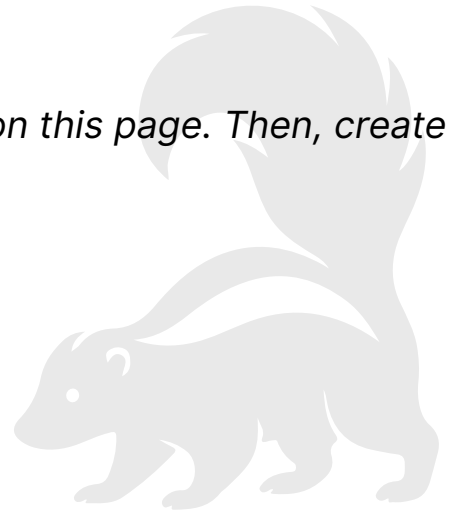


Creature Cards

Learn about skunk adaptations with the resources on this page. Then, create a skunk creature card to share what you learned!

Listen

- [Part 3: Types of Skunks](#)
- [Part 6: Why Skunks Spray](#)



Skunk Adaptations

Skunks can live in many different places because they have special adaptations—features that help them survive. Here are some of their coolest adaptations:

Spray

Skunks can spray a super-smelly liquid to protect themselves. The spray can come out as a stream to aim at one target or as a cloud to cover a big area. The strong smell, caused by chemicals like sulfur, helps scare predators away before they can hurt the skunk.

Markings

Skunks may look different depending on their species, but their bold black-and-white patterns all send the same message: stay away! These markings warn predators that a skunk is not a good animal to mess with.

Nocturnal

Skunks are nocturnal, which means they are awake at night. Being active at night helps them stay cool, avoid danger, and find food without too much competition. Night animals like skunks also have strong senses, especially smelling and hearing.

Create

a creature card that you could trade or collect. Include interesting information about the animal, its appearance, behavior, and other adaptations. Draw and color your card or use a resource to create a digital card. [Trading Card Creator](#)

Extension

Create Creature Cards for other nocturnal animals. Check out this list of the [Top 20 Nocturnal Animals](#). Choose an animal to learn about. Research more information about the animal [here](#) and [here](#), and take notes on interesting facts you find.



Creature Cards: Template

_____ animal name

Special Skills: _____

Diet: _____

Fun Fact: _____

animal picture

_____ animal name

Special Skills: _____

Diet: _____

Fun Fact: _____

animal picture

_____ animal name

Special Skills: _____

Diet: _____

Fun Fact: _____

animal picture

_____ animal name

Special Skills: _____

Diet: _____

Fun Fact: _____

animal picture



Warning Color Art

Listen

- [Part 6: Why Skunks Spray](#)

Draw

We learned that skunks have bold black and white patterns to warn predators about their stinky spray. Design an animal using warning colors to show how it protects itself.

Extension

Compare your animal creation to real animals like skunks, poison dart frogs, or bees.



Upload your design to our Instagram [@tchradio](#), TikTok [@thechildrenshourradio](#), and [Facebook page](#), and check out others' designs!



Mail your design to:
The Children's Hour
PO Box 70236
Albuquerque, NM 87197



Record a Voice Message
This might be used on The Children's Hour!



Post your design on our Instagram, TikTok and Facebook! Check out others' designs!



Skunk Publicity Project

Our guest, Dr. Jerry Dragoo, founded The Dragoo Institute to help people better understand skunks. We learned that skunks are smart, gentle, helpful to the environment, and give warnings before they spray. Share what you learned to help others see how amazing skunks are!

Listen

- [Part 4: How Skunks Can Be Helpful](#)

Skunk Publicity Project

Use what you learned in this episode and the resources in our *Additional Resources* section to **write a short speech, flyer, or video** to teach others how and why it's important to live peacefully with skunks.

Your project should include:

1. Accurate Skunk Facts: Explain at least 2–3 true facts about skunks.

Examples:

- Skunks help ecosystems by eating pests.
- Skunks only spray when they feel threatened.
- Their black-and-white coloring is a warning sign.

2. Why Skunks Matter: Explain why skunks are important to people or the environment.

Examples:

- Skunks eat insects that damage gardens and crops.
- Skunks help control rodent populations.

3. How to Live Peacefully With Skunks: Give at least 2 tips for living safely with skunks.

Examples:

- Keep pet food inside at night.
- Give skunks space and do not scare them.
- Block holes under sheds after skunks leave.

4. Clear Message for Others: Your project should teach or persuade others to respect skunks instead of fearing them.

Examples:

- “Skunks are helpers, not troublemakers.”
- “Understanding skunks helps keep people and pets safe.”

Extensions: Make your project even more convincing by including:

- Specific examples of pests that skunks help control.
- Create a simple food web that includes a skunk.
- Use pictures or drawings.
- Use vocabulary words like *adaptation*, *predator*, or *ecosystem*.
- End with a strong message encouraging kindness toward wildlife.





Design a Skunk Habitat!

“What makes a good pet is a good pet care-taker.” -Dr. Jerry Dragoo

Listen

- [Part 5: What It's Like Working with Skunks](#)

Design a skunk habitat:

Extension

Build a model of a skunk's habitat.





Smell Science: Olfactory Fatigue

Our guest, Dr. Jerry Dragoo, talked about how skunk spray is so strong and stinky that it completely overwhelms your nose. But after a while, your nose gets exhausted from smelling that really strong smell and stops registering it. This is called **olfactory fatigue**.

Listen

- [Part 2: What Makes Skunks Stink?](#)

Try It Out

Do this experiment to learn firsthand how your sense of smell works and why strong odors can seem to disappear over time.

Materials

Circle the scent you smelled:

- Citrus peel
- Vinegar
- Other: _____

Step 1: First Smell

1. Describe the smell: _____

2. How strong did the smell seem? (Circle one)

Very strong

Strong

Medium

Weak

Step 2: Second Smell (After a Short Break)

1. Did the smell seem stronger, weaker, or the same? _____

2. Why do you think it smelled different (or the same)? _____

Vocabulary

olfactory fatigue means: _____



Smell Science: Olfactory Fatigue

Reflect

1. Why doesn't tomato juice really get rid of skunk spray smell? _____

2. How does olfactory fatigue help explain what happens when someone smells skunk spray? _____

Draw & Think

Draw a picture showing what happens to your nose when it smells something strong for a long time.



Additional Resources

[What To Do About Skunks](#)

This article from Humane World for Animals provides information about how and why it's important to live peacefully with skunks.

Learn more skunk facts at [National Geographic Kids](#).

Research striped skunks at [Animal Diversity Web](#).

Learn more about [taxonomy with Library for Kids](#).

Educators, check out this [lesson on taxonomy and classification](#).

Practice [How to Draw a Skunk](#).

Videos

[Is That Skunk?](#)

Watch the PBS Nature episode featuring our guest, Dr. Jerry Dragoo.

[Skunk Facts: Not Always Stinky!](#)

Learn all about the different types of skunks that live in the Americas.

[Wild Explorers: Meet a Skunk](#)

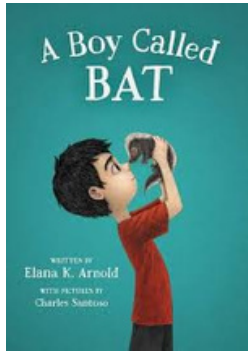
Meet a real striped skunk and learn some fun facts about them.

[Here are some videos about the book series *A Boy Called BAT*.](#)

This is a great book for [One School, One Book school-wide reading programs!](#)



Book List

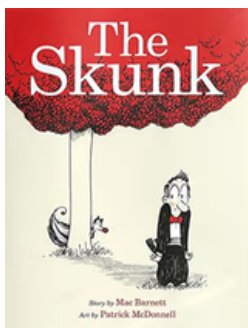


A Boy Called BAT

by Elana K. Arnold, illustrated by Charles Santoso

This is the first in a heartwarming middle-grade series following a young boy on the autism spectrum as he tries to convince his veterinarian mother to let him keep an orphaned skunk kit as a pet. Listen to Kids' Crew's Evan Dates review on [The Children's Hour, episode "Skunks"](#) (segment 50:25-52:14).

age 6-12

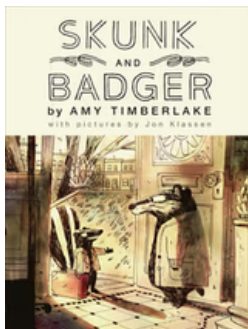


The Skunk

by Mac Barnett, illustrated by Patrick McDonnell

This witty picture book is about a man who flees a persistent skunk across the city, only to realize he misses the surprising companionship it brings.

ages 4-8



Skunk and Badger

by Amy Timberlake, illustrated by Jon Klassen

This early chapter book series features a delightful animal-odd-couple and includes non-fiction elements alongside a story of unexpected friendship.

ages 7-10



The Secret Life of the Skunk

by Laurence Pringle, illustrated by Kae Garchinsky

Follow a skunk family to learn the hidden habits of this famously stinky mammal as the kits grow from babies into adults. Available on [Epic!](#)

ages 6-9



Is That a Skunk?

by Gary Bogue, illustrated by Chuck Todd

When a skunk moves into their backyard, Lucas and his family learn about its habits and discover how to live peacefully with their unexpected neighbor.

ages 4-8