

Introduction to Taxonomy

Allie Kreutzer

Overview: This activity will use the *Guide to the Salt Marshes and Tidal Creeks of the Southeastern United States* as a way of exploring the different organisms that live in the salt marsh habitat. Students will use critical thinking skills to match descriptions to the correct organism and also classify organisms based on different physical and behavioral characteristics. This activity also allows for students to conduct additional research to learn more about an organism by using the guide as a reference.

Objectives:

- Students will use the *Guide to the Salt Marshes and Tidal Creeks of the Southeastern United States* to learn about common organisms that inhabit the salt marsh habitat.
- Students will understand the specific characteristics (behavioral and physical) associated with the organisms in the salt marsh
- Students will use critical thinking skills to classify groups of organisms based on shared characteristics.
- Students will investigate an organisms to research and le

Grade Level(s): 3rd – 5th

Time: 45 Minutes

Materials

- *Guide to the Salt Marshes and Tidal Creeks of the Southeastern United States*
- Copies of the fauna pages of the guide
- Scissors

Set Up:

- Make copies of the fauna pages.
- Cut the pages so that you have individual cards of 1) the organism and 2) description.

Procedure:

- Give each student one of the organism cards.
- Ask students to describe their organism the best they can using everything they know about it.
- Put all of the organism pictures in one pile and then all of the descriptions in another pile.
- Have one student come up and read a description that isn't theirs and then try and pick the animal that it is.

- Play as many rounds as time permits allowing different students to try to match the descriptions.
- Discuss with students what characteristics made it easiest to pick out the animal (or plant).
- Then put students in groups giving each group one full set of organisms and have students attempt to classify them (using whatever metrics they choose). You may choose to give them rules (like they must be in 3 groups, or put them in order of how closely they are related to each other... or let them decide completely on their own).
- Compare each group's classification

Wrap Up:

Explain that in taxonomy scientists take all of those metrics and more to classify an animal. Show them the official classification with the taxonomic scheme. Discuss as a class the metric that separates each level (phyla, class, order, etc.). Use this as a springboard to delve further into classification.

Assessment:

At the beginning of the activity, calculate how many students match up the organism with the correct description. Conduct this activity later on in the unit and calculate the number of correctly vs. incorrectly matched organisms and descriptions.

Extension:

You could also take this a step further and let them figure out how they would make the field guide allowing each student to research one animal.