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## The Crazy Critter Club - Lesson Plans

Caitlin Flynn Copenhaver

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*

Audrey Anderson

*University of Nebraska - Lincoln*

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Crazy Critter Club!

CLC Expanded Learning Opportunity Clubs

UNL Honors Program

Audrey Anderson & Caitlin Copenhaver

## Club Logistics

**Grade Levels:** 3-6

**Number of Attendees:** 10

**Goal:** The goal of the Cool Critter Club is to engage elementary and middle school-aged children with the environment. We want the kids to develop a relationship with nature so they are interested and passionate about conservation.

**Resources:** Information for the club is retrieved from the Nebraska Game and Parks Website, National Geographic, and other credible Internet resources.

**Content Areas:** STEM & Wellness

**Output/Final Product:** There is no final product for the club. Our goal is to get the kids engaged with the natural world and passionate about conservation. On our final day, we are hoping to do an outside Biocube activity.

**Introduction to Club:** Our club is the Crazy Critter Club! We want to engage kids with cool animals and the environment. We are hoping to use a combination of informational presentations, interactive activities, and reflections to maximize student learning and enjoyment.

**General Direction:** We plan to start off each class with a greeting and by giving a brief description of the plan for the day, and then introducing the “Crazy Animal” of the day. We are then going to give a short, interactive lecture about that day’s topic. Then we will then move onto the activity of the day. With 5-7 minutes left we will initiate clean-up and reflection time to review what the class learned that day.

## Lesson Plans

**Lesson Activity Name:** Week 1: Introduction to the Cool Critter Club!

**Length of Activity:** 1 hour

**Supplies:** Access to a projector & screen, printed snowflake templates, scissors

**Directions:**

- **Introduction:** We will introduce ourselves, why we are passionate about animals and the environment, and how the Cool Critter Club will work. We will explain the design of the club, our rules, and then introduce the first “Crazy Animal of the Day.”
- **Animal Name Game:** We are going to play a game to help everyone learn each other’s names. We are going to try to form a socially distanced circle. The first person will introduce themselves with an animal that starts with the first letter of their name, ex: “I am Aardvark Audrey.” Then the next person will reintroduce the previous person/people and then introduce themselves, ex: “She is Aardvark Audrey and I am Canary Caitlin.” This continues until everyone in the circle is introduced.
- **Animal Snowflakes:** We will pass out papers and scissors to every student. The papers have printed animal designs on them. We will show the class how to fold the snowflake and then cut out their animal design!
- **Conclusion:** We will have the students clean up their paper scraps and scissors. We will then have a brief reflection.

**Conclusion/Reflection:** We will ask the students if there are any topics they are excited to learn about or that they would be interested in us covering. We are also going to ask the students if they can remember our names and the names of at least three of their clubmates.

**Parts of the activity that worked:** The kids enjoyed the activities. They were able to successfully name and nickname all the members of the club. Some of them also enjoyed the snowflakes and put many creative twists on them, such as coloring them.

**Parts of the activity that did not work:** Folding the snowflakes was a little complex for some of the kids as we were working with a younger age group. We also had some kids who lost interest and left partway through the activities.

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**Lesson Activity Name:** Week 2: Community Critters-What animals would you find in your community?

**Length of Activity:** 1 hour

**Supplies:** Access to a projector & screen

**Directions:**

- **Introduction:** We will start class by greeting the students, having a brief overview of the activities for the day, and introduce the “Crazy Animal of the Day.”
- **Community Critters:** Brief presentation of the animals that you find in an urban setting including mammals (squirrels, rabbits, racoons), birds (songbirds, raptors), and insects (butterflies, fireflies, praying mantis, grasshoppers, ants, bees)
- **Waggle Dance Introduction:** One form of communication bees use is dancing! We will show the students how bees dance and what it means.
- **Waggle Dance Activity:** We will have the students create their own dance to either 1. Demonstrate how they would dance if they needed to give directions to food or 2. Demonstrate a dance that expresses their personality. The dance can be a full body one or one with just hand gestures.
- **Conclusion:** We will have a brief reflection.

**Conclusion/Reflection:** We are going to ask the students what dance motions were the most useful to convey information. We are also going to challenge them to be on the lookout for any local wildlife and report back next week about what they saw.

**Parts of the activity that worked:** The kids really enjoyed the dance activity! Everyone participated and had very unique dances to represent their personalities.

**Parts of the activity that did not work:** The content about Community Critter did take some time and the kids got antsy. It was also difficult to reign them back in for the conclusion after the dance activity.

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**Lesson Activity Name:** Week 3: What Do You Need for a Healthy Ecosystem? - Let's Make an Ecosystem

**Length of Activity:** 1 hour

**Supplies:** Access to a projector & screen, biodegradable pots, seeds, soil, rocks, and water.

**Directions:**

- **Introduction:** We will start class by greeting the students, having a brief overview of the activities for the day, and introduce the “Crazy Animal of the Day.” We are going to discuss if they found any animals over the past week.
- **What Do You Need for a Healthy Ecosystem?:** This lesson will cover the importance of different environmental features. There will be a special focus on biotic and abiotic factors, as well as how different systems work with each other.
- **Let's Make an Ecosystem:** We will help lead the students in creating their own little ecosystem. They will fill the pot with soil and add plant seeds. They will water their plant seeds and receive rocks to help decorate the ecosystem.
- **Conclusion:** We are going to have a brief conclusion and reflection.

**Conclusion/Reflection:** We are going to ask the students to observe and reflect on how the different parts of our model worked with each other. We are also going to ask the students to think about how all the different items in the model played an important role.

**Parts of the activity that worked:** The kids were very engaged in the gardening activity. We added extra species and elements to the pots, and then we planted the pots at the site. A week later, they had already begun sprouting. The kids put worms in the garden and were very eager to show us the progress that their flowers had made.

**Parts of the activity that did not work:** We had a little trouble with getting the kids to calm down for the lesson at the beginning. In addition, this activity can be rather messy, so we did it outside. It was a bit windy, so we had to be wary of trash flying away or the kids accidentally littering. Also, we had to make sure that the kids didn't accidentally overwater their plants, not put enough soil in, etc.

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**Lesson Activity Name:** Week 4: Biodiversity-Why do we need a variety of plants and animals?

**Length of Activity:** 1 hour

**Supplies:** Access to a projector, Biodiversity Board, yarn, dry-erase marker, scenario box, and scissors.

**Directions:**

- **Introduction:** We will start class by greeting the students, having a brief overview of the activities for the day, and introduce the “Crazy Animal of the Day.”
- **Biodiversity:** This week’s lesson will cover all of the cool biodiversity in the world. We will talk about the importance of biodiversity and the role that it plays in keeping the ecosystem healthy.
- **The Biodiversity Board:** The Biodiversity Board showcases the Nebraskan prairie ecosystem. On the board, there are pieces of string connecting the various species; that means that they are reliant on each other. For example, a string connecting a rabbit and a hawk would represent an important prey-predator relationship. We will then pull a scenario card out of the scenario box. This scenario may have a positive, negative, or neutral effect on the ecosystem. Negative scenarios mean that we will have to cut strings on the board. If all of the strings that a species is connected to are cut, then the species has gone “extinct” in the ecosystem! The goal is to keep as many species from going extinct as you can.
- **Conclusion:** We will end with a brief conclusion and reflection.

**Conclusion/Reflection:** We will ask the students to reflect on the events of the game and if they found lots of interesting connections between species. We will also talk about how it might be similar to an ecosystem in real life.

**Parts of the activity that worked:** The students really enjoyed the Biodiversity Board game. They liked to look at the pictures of the animals and ask questions.

**Parts of the activity that did not work:** Many of the kids had a difficult time choosing which animals to cut a string from or accidentally cutting too many strings or not the right ones. This is definitely an activity that works better with older students.

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**Lesson Activity Name:** Week 5: Environment in Trouble - How Can We Help?

**Length of Activity:** 1 hour

**Supplies:** Access to a projector & screen, Goldfish snacks, Starbursts, Ziploc bags, chopsticks, and paper bowls will be provided by us.

**Directions:**

- **Introduction:** We will start class by greeting the students, having a brief overview of the activities for the day, and introduce the “Crazy Animal of the Day.”
- **Tragedy of the Commons Game:** Each student is the head of a family who is fishing to feed their family. They need two fish to feed their family. If they only catch one, their family will go hungry but if they catch more than two fish they will make a profit. Every student will receive individually packaged goldfish and a paper bowl. Twenty goldfish will be placed in the bowl, simulating a lake with fish. Each student will have 1 minute to collect as many fish as they can using chopsticks. After “catching” two fish for their families, each additional fish earns a Starburst. The instructors, who act as “The Fishing Company”, will announce how many fish we caught, and the students will remove them from the bowl. For every two fish still in the bowl, one more is put in. The fishing continues for three more rounds or until no one can still support their family. At the end, the students can place their goldfish and starbursts back in the Ziploc back and take them home to eat.
- **Tragedy of the Commons Reflection:** We will ask the students, what strategy they needed to use to keep supporting their family? How did the fishing company ruin your plans?
- **How Can We Help?:** We will discuss various problems facing the environment, tying the lesson back to all the other information that the club has learned so far. In addition, we will discuss fun, easy ways to help make a difference.
- **Conclusion:** We will have a brief conclusion and reflection.

**Conclusion/Reflection:** We will discuss real life examples of the Tragedy of the Commons and what we need to do to not exploit the resources.

**Parts of the activity that worked:** The kids were very invested in the game and would try to get the greatest number of goldfish out each round. The Starbursts were a good motivator and the kids asked if we could play again.

**Parts of the activity that did not work:** This activity was done outside which caused some difficulties because the paper bowls would blow away the wind. The kids also became so competitive that they would take other kid’s goldfish or cheer by picking them up with their hands. It was also difficult for some students to understand that the Starbursts and more goldfish

were awarded based upon how they performed and not everyone would receive an equal number. This activity was also frustrating for students who could not handle chopsticks well and additional instructor support may be needed.

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**Lesson Activity Name:** Week 6: Wild World!-What are some of nature's craziest organisms?

**Length of Activity:** 1 hour

**Supplies:** Access to projector & screen, UV paint, UV light, baby oil, plastic containers, warm water, straws, masking tape, and pipecleaners

**Directions:**

- **Introduction:** We will start class by greeting the students, having a brief overview of the activities for the day, and introduce the “Crazy Animal of the Day.”
- **Wild World:** We will give a presentation on some of the coolest animals in nature and their unique adaptations.
- **Brilliant Bioluminescence Activity:** In this activity, we are going to simulate bioluminesce. The instructors will prepare the paint by adding warm water and mixing it together. Each student will receive a small bowl of baby oil. Students will be able to individually come up to the table and select colors by using straws. After every student has collected their colors, we will turn off the lights and shine the UV light, and will see the paint glow!
  - **Building a Biocube:** While the students are waiting to be called up to collect their colors, they will receive pipe cleaners to build a Biocube. During instruction time, we will demonstrate how to twist the pipe cleaners together.
- **Conclusion:** We will clean up and have a brief reflection.

**Conclusion/Reflection:** We collect all of the Biocubes from students for the next week's activity. We will discuss what animals the students found the most interesting and whether they know any other interesting creatures.

**Parts of the activity that worked:** Having 2 activities run concurrently was pretty efficient, and the kids really enjoyed designing the biocubes and looking at the paint glow in the dark.

**Parts of the activity that did not work:** The cleanup for this activity was a bit extensive due to the arts and crafts materials. Some of the kids would also get distracted by what was going on at the other station.

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**Lesson Activity Name:** Week 7: Earth Week Nature Walk!

**Length of Activity:** 1 hour

**Supplies:** Access to a projector & screen and the pipecleaner Biocubes that were created the week prior

**Directions:**

- **Introduction:** We will start class by greeting the students, having a brief overview of the activities for the day, and introduce the “Crazy Animal of the Day.”
- **Nature Walk:** We will pass out the Biocubes that were created the week prior. We will then head outside to a grassy area. The students will closely examine what nature they can find within their cubes and they will also have the opportunity to walk around and enjoy the outdoors.
- **Conclusion:** We will come back inside and have a brief reflection.

**Conclusion/Reflection:** We will discuss what plants and animals we found outside. We will also talk about what the students enjoyed about the club and where we could improve.

**Parts of the activity that worked:** The kids enjoyed being outside and getting lots of energy out. We saw lots of cool plants and animals.

**Parts of the activity that did not work:** The kids did not use the Biocubes as much as expected. It was also a bit difficult to keep them in a group when they were outside as some wanted to wander off a bit.

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Club Name: Crazy Critter Club Instructors: Audrey and Caitlin

Day of the week: Tuesdays Grade Level: 5-8

Endzone Goal!

Week 7 - Outdoor Adventures!

- To celebrate the week of Earth Day, we are going to have an extra special class day. The lesson portion will be really short, and it will cover what Biocubes are and how to make them so that we can use them in our activity later.
- Our activity will be a nature walk! Assuming that the weather is nice, the class can go outside and try to find cool plants and animals. We will use the Biocubes from earlier to closely observe small portions of nature.

Week 6 - Wild World

- This week's lesson features some of the coolest and craziest animals around the world. We are going to learn lots of cool new fun facts! There will be a special focus on animal adaptations, as it ties into our activity.
- Our activity is Brilliant Bioluminescence, where the class will create a simulation of bioluminescence using UV paint and oil.

Week 5 - Environment in Trouble

- This week, the lesson will cover some of the issues that are facing the environment and threatening biodiversity.
- Our activity is the Tragedy of the Commons game, where we will simulate a real life example through a fun game with snacks.

Week 4 - Biodiversity

- This week's lesson is about the importance of having all sorts of different plants, animals, and other organisms in an ecosystem. It will also talk about the interconnectedness of life.
- Our activity will be the Biodiversity Board, an interactive game that demonstrates how different parts of the ecosystem affect each other and the importance of biodiversity.

Week 3 - What Do You Need for a Healthy Environment

- This week's lesson is about the different components of a healthy ecosystem, including many of the different biotic and abiotic factors.
- Our activity will be Let's Make an Ecosystem, where we will lead the class in creating an ecosystem diorama with fun elements like live plants.

Week 2 - Community Critters

- This week's lesson is focused on native wildlife that the students can find around Lincoln such as squirrels, rabbits, songbirds, raptors, bees, and more. We will especially focus on bees as they tie into our activity for the day.
- This week's activity is the Dance Like a Bee activity, where students can create their own dances to communicate different things just like bees do.

Week 1 - Introduction to the Club

- This week, we will focus on introducing the club and getting to know the students better.
- Our activities will be the Nickname game and creating paper animal snowflakes.

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