

Hide and Seek

Cross-Curricular Focus: Life Science



In the wild, it often comes down to **predator** and **prey**, the hunter and the hunted. As you can imagine, most organisms want to stay alive. They have developed ways of adapting to severe **habitats**, and hiding or escaping from those who would like to eat them. So how do they do it?

One very helpful adaptation is called **camouflage**. You may have been surprised by an animal that was using camouflage in the past. It blended into its surroundings so well that you nearly missed seeing it at all. Its coloring, markings, or other physical features resemble its habitat so much that you can look directly at it without seeing it at first. This is often good enough to fool a predator that is scanning an area to look for food. This helps prey to hide from its predator. But did you know that it often works the other way around, too? Predators can use camouflage to trap their prey. If a predator wants to eat a certain animal, and that animal cannot see it lying in wait, it can pounce on its prey unexpectedly, devouring it before it even knows what is happening.

Another popular adaptation is **mimicry**. Mimicry is when an animal has markings or other physical characteristics that allow it to look like some other kind of animal or plant. If it can make its predators believe that it is something that preys on them, or would at least be difficult or painful to catch, its predator will often go off in search of an easier target.

Sometimes animals are able to survive when their habitat changes because they adapt to the new conditions. For example, birds that were accustomed to nesting on high cliffs or in tall trees have survived industrialization of their habitat by learning to nest in the crevices of tall buildings. Raccoons easily adapt to residential areas that have taken over their woodland homes. They often help themselves to any food they can grab, whether it is in trashcans, or inside people's homes!

Name: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) What is the function of camouflage in the wild?

2) Compare and contrast camouflage and mimicry. How are they different? How are they the same?

3) What would motivate wild raccoons to enter people's homes?

4) If you were a wild animal, would you rather have the ability to mimic another animal, or the ability to camouflage yourself? Why? _____

5) Why do you think cliff-dwelling birds feel at home on the ledges of skyscrapers? _____
