

BLACK BEARS AND FOOD IN THE SCHOOLYARD



A Lesson Plan

Objective

To make students and their communities aware that keeping food away from bears is the most important thing we can do to prevent human/bear interactions.

Grades

K-8

Subjects

Art, Language Arts, Science, Government

NJ Standards

5.12, 6.9

Concepts

 There are many ways to bear-proof your surroundings, helping to minimize interactions between people and bears.

 The form of the message, in design and layout, is important when trying to teach people something that you have learned about bears, that they might not know.

Skills

Analyzing, Critical Thinking, Decision Making, Designing

Materials

Chalkboard and chalk, crayons, markers, paints, pencils, poster board

Vocabulary

Nutritious - having good food value; garbage is nutritious and available, making it ideal bear food.

Interaction - to act upon one another; bears interact with people when they use garbage as food.

Habituate - get used to; bears become habituated to people if they are near them all the time.

Conserve - to keep from losing; it is important that we conserve bears for the future.





DIRECTIONS



Read the “Black Bears and Food” article.



Do a research project at your school. Find out where your school’s garbage goes. Start with the garbage cans in the lunchroom and follow the garbage trail until it reaches its final destination. Then do the same thing with the garbage in the schoolyard. Answer the following questions as you uncover the trail of garbage:

1. Where does the garbage go after it leaves the lunchroom or schoolyard?
2. Was it stored in a place where a bear couldn’t get to it or smell it?
3. Where did it go next? If it went to a dumpster, is the dumpster bear-proof?
4. If the dumpster was built to be bear-proof, is it still functioning? Was the lid kept shut? Was there garbage or old food items on the ground around the dumpster that would attract bears into your school yard?
5. Are there trash cans in the schoolyard? Are they bear-proof?
6. Think of ways your school can bear-proof the schoolyard. Remember that bears are attracted to things that smell like food. **HINT:** *There are probably other things around the schoolyard that will need to bear-proofed.*



BLACK BEARS AND FOOD



Black bears have always lived in New Jersey. We are hearing about them more and more as New Jersey's black bear and people populations grow. People are moving into areas where bears live. And bears are moving into places where people live. This causes problems. Bears and people are interacting with each other more often. They can be seen in dumpsters behind businesses, schools, and campgrounds. They get into garbage around people's houses and in parks. Bears can get food, such as garbage, very easily.

Why would they want to eat our garbage? Garbage is nutritious to a bear, because it is higher in protein than most foods they can find in the wild.

Bears are creatures of habit. They walk the same trails day after day. They eat the same foods from the same places year after year. So if your garbage is available, they'll remember, and they will keep coming back year after year. Is this a problem? DEFINITELY! Have you ever heard the saying "Keep our bears wild -- don't feed the bears"? Bears that eat people's garbage, may become habituated to people. They may lose their fear of humans. They might not run when you try to scare them and they may become mean. Once a bear becomes habituated, it may try and get food from other places. A fed bear may even try to break into someone's house. It might go to dumpsters and garbage cans in the area. Feeding bears creates problem bears for everyone in your neighborhood, not just you. And any bear that breaks into someone's house, or eats a pet will have to be destroyed. That's why people say "Keep our bears wild -- don't feed the bears"!



Garbage spilled on the ground after a black bear rummaged through it.

Did you know that it is illegal to feed bears in New Jersey? That means if you are caught feeding bears, you will get a big fine. You can not put food out for the bears, leave pet food, garbage or birdseed out where bears can get it. Your neighbors don't want problem bears in your neighborhood. Do you?

Remember, we want to keep our bears wild. That is why keeping food away from bears is the most important thing we can do to prevent human/bear interactions. This will make people safer and will help conserve bears for the future.