



LEARNING GOALS

From mountain peaks to under the seas, discover amazing animal adaptations in environments across the Americas.

STANDARDS

Science
3.1, 3.4, 3.7

Geography
3.1, 3.2

ESTIMATED TIME

5–10 minutes per region, totaling 30–60 minutes for all six regions

Pick a few regions or questions to explore, or do them all.

BACK IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Think about all of the habitats and adaptations you saw while you were at the Museum. Choose one habitat and create the ultimate animal to live in this habitat. Get creative and make up new body parts and adaptations. When you are finished drawing your imaginary yet highly adapted animal, write about why you chose each adaptation and body part.



JUNIOR ZOOLOGIST: Diversity of Life

Start at the Diversity of Life display at the entrance to the North American Wildlife Hall. What does “diversity is the spice of life” mean to you? Look at the variety of animals in this display. Pick one adaptation that you find interesting and explain why an animal would need this adaptation for their habitat.

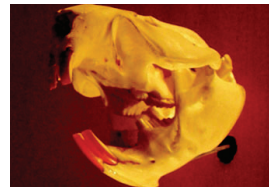
BEAVERS: Lumberjack Family Engineers a Safe Home

On a frosty October day, a beaver family gnaws together in preparation for a long winter in Colorado’s Rocky Mountains.

Take a closer look: Imagine making a beaver family photo album from what you see in the diorama. What photos would you take to show how they are engineering their world to make it warm and safe from hungry predators? (Beaver hint: flooded stream)



Activity: At the nearby Diversity of Life display, pick one animal you can imagine adding to the beaver diorama. What animal did you choose and why?



Your life: Build a beaver. Think about the well-adapted beaver and its body parts. What everyday objects could you use to build a beaver? (Hint: kickboard for a tail, nail clippers for teeth)

MOOSE, UNGAINLY UNGULATE: Big Snout Keeps Water Out

Two moose eating their way through the day startle an Arctic ground squirrel scurrying to safety below the cold Alaskan tundra.

Take a closer look: Choose which moose body part you think most helps these huge herbivores eat 15 to 44 pounds of willows, dwarf birch, berries, and grasses every day. Make up a riddle that others can guess. (Moose hint: When eating underwater plants in ponds, a moose snout shuts water out.)



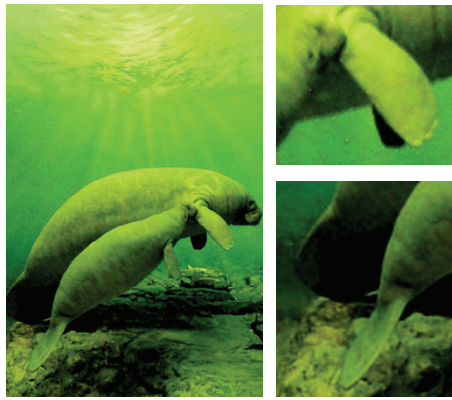
Activity: Imagine a blizzard just blasted through this region of the wildlife hall, dumping caribou belly-deep snow. Pick a mammal adaptation for surviving the storm. Would you hibernate underground, power your way through drifts on long legs, snowshoe across the top of the snow, grow a warm coat of white Arctic fox fur, or invent a new adaptation? Explain your choice.

Your life: How do you prepare for changes in the seasons?

WEST INDIAN MANATEE: Endangered Species Grazes on Undersea Grass

In Florida's warm and still waters, a torpedo-shaped manatee and her calf paddle sluggishly below a sunlit surface.

Take a closer look: Try a manatee challenge. You weigh 1,300 pounds, swim so slowly that algae grow on your back, and eat 60 to 100 pounds of grass daily. How would you navigate with your tail, nail-studded flippers, and bristly snout through a maze of underwater rivers to eat constantly? (Manatee hint: tail for steering)



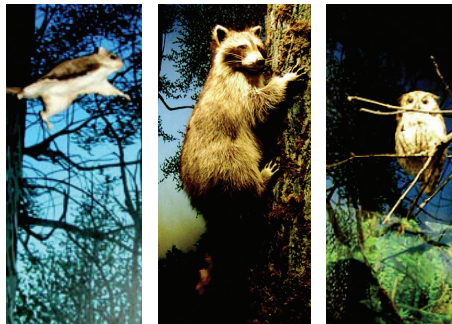
Activity: Save the manatee. Looking at these manatees, how do you think their bodies and habits limit them from living elsewhere? Turn your observations into a comment, poster, skit, or song to protect these mammals endangered by motorboat accidents and habitat loss.

Your life: Manatees rely on keen vision and hearing to navigate Florida waters. What sense helps you the most to swim, walk in the dark, or play hide-and-seek?

SMOKIES AT NIGHT: Flying Squirrels, Raccoons, and Owls Thrive in the Dark

A paragliding southern flying squirrel, night-sight raccoon, and keen-hearing barn owl hunt in a pitch-black Great Smoky Mountains forest.

Take a closer look: As a flying squirrel pilot, how would you use your tail and flight skins—stretching like a sail from your limbs—to leap, glide, and land safely on all four feet?



Activity: Imagine life as a nocturnal mammal in the Smokies at Night diorama. Listen like an owl, glide like a flying squirrel, or see into the night with raccoon vision. How would you hunt in the dark if you were a nocturnal animal?

Your life: If you were awake all night and slept most of the day, how would this change your life? Do you know anyone who works at night and sleeps during the day?

WOLVERINES: "Skunk Bears" Look for Their Next Meal

In Alaska's frigid boreal forest, two ferocious and hungry wolverines scan their frozen world for a new meal.

Take a closer look: In front of the wolverine diorama, imagine joining this pair in their search for food. What challenges in their environment might make it difficult to find food? What adaptations would you use to help you catch your prey? (Hint: eyes, jaws, claws, bear-like body)



Activity: Make up a haiku or other type of poem about using your adaptations to hunt for food.

Your life: Wolverines get their food from a variety of sources and methods. Where do you obtain the food you eat? Imagine you had to hunt for your food; how would this change how you eat?

GRAY WOLVES: Communicating to Hunt a Herd of Caribou

On Alaska's frigid tundra, a pack of gray wolves readies for a chase.

Take a closer look: Which wolf body part would help the most to hunt the caribou in the distance: big ears, binocular-like eyes, keen sense of smell, or legs designed for speed? Tell a story about your wolf-caribou chase.



Activity: Pick out ways you think these wolves might be communicating with each other. Then use your eyes, mouth, or body to act it out. Can your friends guess your wolf message?

Your life: What facial expressions, body language, or sounds help you communicate without words to your friends and family?