

First Impressions

Noticing first reactions to different animals and how they can change!

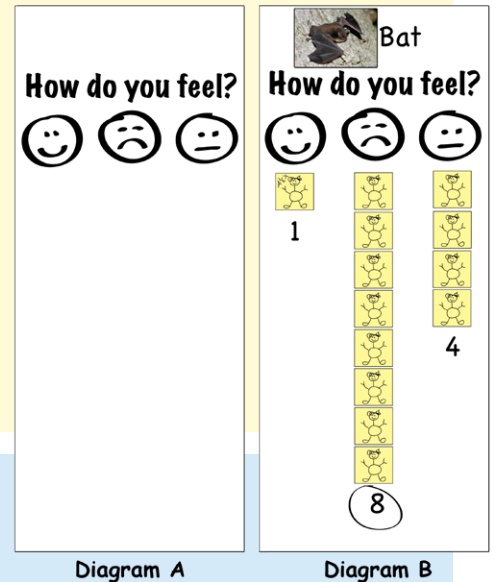
About First Impressions

People respond differently to different animals. What makes one person recoil in fear, may cause another to lean in with curiosity. When we are young, reactions are strongly influenced by those of peers, parents, and other important adults.

Certain species are generally less liked; snakes, spiders, wolves, and bats for example are perceived as dangerous and are more likely to be feared. However, this perception can also be informed by culture. In some cultures, bats are seen as good luck!

Negative impressions about an animal may change as accurate information is learned and pleasant experiences with them are had. For example: Learning that most spiders are harmless and that they are important for healthy ecosystems may lessen an initial fear.

Revisiting this activity over time is a great way to explore changing impressions.



Materials:

- Rope, masking tape, or hula hoops
- Chart paper or white board and marking pen
- Pictures of animals (use the included animal cards or select your own)
- Post-it notes (or slips of paper and tape) to serve as graphing units

Preparation:

- Determine how many and which animal pictures to use for your group. Consider including at least one likely to get a positive reaction and one likely to get a negative reaction.
- Use rope, masking tape or hula hoops to make three large circles on the floor. Within each circle, draw or place a picture of a face: one with a smile, one with a frown, one with a neutral mouth.
- Make a graph like that of **Diagram A** above.
- If desired, participants can personalize the slips of paper to be used as graphing units by drawing self portraits.

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Ready, Set, Graph!

1. Have participants stand outside the circles on the floor. Discuss each of the faces and their meanings: “smiley”, “frowny”, and “unsure”.
2. Hold up a picture of an animal. Stay as neutral as possible when presenting the animals to prevent participants from reacting to your reaction! Ask participants to stand in the circle that best describes how they feel about that animal. Once inside the circle, they may sit down and make the face that shows how they feel.
3. Show participants the graph. Write the name of the animal and post its picture. One circle at a time, have participants go up and add their personalized post-it to the appropriate column. Count up the number of units in each column and write the number below. You may wish to note the numbers or take a photo if you plan to revisit impressions at a later time.
4. Which column has the most units? The least? Encourage participants to discuss the results and their feelings regarding the animal. Why do they feel as they do? What do they already know about the animal, and what would they like to find out? Record responses.
5. Repeat for each animal you’ve chosen. Draw a line to separate each section or create a new graph. Personalized post-its can be reused.

Time to investigate

After the activity, take time with participants to find answers to their questions about the animals. You might read books, view photos, tell stories, watch documentary films, or invite an expert to speak (perhaps with “animal ambassadors”). After participants have learned more, repeat the graphing game with the same animals. Explore changing (and unchanging) impressions!

Getting Outside!

When we learn new things about an animal, we usually feel better about it. Take a walk outside and look for an animal you are undecided about. When you see one, quietly observe it for a while.

Try to notice something new about that animal that you hadn’t known before.

What did you observe? How did it make you feel?

Write it down or draw a picture. Share your new knowledge with your friends and family. You may help others learn more about the animal and think again about their own impressions of it!



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First Impressions Cards



Banana Slug



Barred Owl



Little Brown Bat



Red Squirrel

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Zebra Jumping Spider



Pine Marten



Garter Snake



Black Bear

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Western Toad



Western Painted Turtle



Cougar



Canada Goose

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Deer Mouse



Porcupine



Bumble Bee



Dragonfly

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Mosquito



Moose



Coyote



Marmot

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Northern Pike



Coho Salmon



Raccoon



Mule Deer

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First Impressions Cards



Pacific Chorus Frog



Rough-skinned Newt



Crayfish



Leech

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