

Squirrel Activities for K - 3



Introduction

I learned early in my 20+ year career as an educator, that how I taught was so much more important than what I taught. My experiences convinced me that children that are given opportunities to ask questions, to investigate and to relate new knowledge to their everyday lives, result in more attentive, positive and independent students. Once you teach in a way that matches the way kids learn, it's easier to have captivated students, and it's also easier to get kids to take actions, like participating in math or reading or writing activities.

I provide tips, resources and products designed to help you create learning environments that are places of inquiry, exploration, problem solving and creative thought processes. I help you know how to explain to parents why their child is observing and recording the critters in a jar of pond water, rather than sitting at a desk filling out and bring home realms of worksheets!

I've always loved interacting with young children and appreciate the way they learn, their inquiring minds and the questions they ask. I enjoy their wonder of life, their ability to live in the present, and their spontaneous and fresh way of expressing their knowledge. I've been inspired by an inquiry based learning approach for many years and have tried to incorporate it when educating children or writing a blog.

I've stepped back from a busy teaching schedule and now spend more time as an educational blogger, a tutor, and an instructor of sketching and illustrated journaling classes. I live in BC, Canada and am a BC Ministry of Education certified teacher with a BEd degree. I've completed Web and Print Design certification programs and numerous art courses, If you would like regular updates of blog posts, go to <http://www.kindergarten-lessons.com> and join the group.

Providing opportunities for students to observe and investigate, to ask questions, to sort and compare, to measure and test, to learn new vocabulary and to record their observations and new knowledge.

PATRICIA



Squirrels

Introduction

These activities about squirrels are designed to last a week or two, depending on the interest of the students. Squirrels live in playgrounds, school yards and parks in many places and are familiar to most children. They are one of the few wild animals that students can observe outside and ask questions about. Autumn is a great time to study them, as the squirrels are busy storing their food stocks for winter.

Getting started

- Start by reading a squirrel story, such as *The Busy Little Squirrel* by Nancy Tafuri to the children.
- Have a KWL chart prepared (see image below).
- Ask students to tell you their squirrel stories and what they know about squirrels (or what they think they know).
- When you are recording their responses, keep it short, just draw a simple picture and one or two words as younger kids will not sit still too long for this activity!

Student Activity - before taking a trip outside

- Tell students they are going outside later on, specifically to look at squirrels.
- Guide children to make predictions about what they might see squirrels doing outside.
- Students then draw pictures about one thing they think they might see.
- Students post their pictures on a chart or wall for all to see.

Squirrels		
What we know	What we wonder about...	What we learned!

Outside observation & focus topics

Direct the students' attention on one focus topic

If possible, provide a number of times for the students to go outside and study squirrels during the week and focus on one topic each time.

Focus topic #1 - Questions About Appearance

Are all the squirrels the same? Is there anything different about the squirrels? Encourage children to use their senses. Shut eyes and listen - are the squirrels making noises?

Focus topic #2 - Questions About Survival

Questions that focus on what squirrels need to survive (food, water, and shelter). Can you see what they are eating? What are the squirrels doing? Why are they ...? How do...?

Focus topic #3 - Questions About Adaptation

What is it about the squirrel that helps it live in the forest?

- Take a clipboard and pencil outside with you and ask the children to tell you what they notice or wonder about.
- Record one or two questions or comments per child.

Skills children are practicing

- Observation - have children look up in the trees, around the base of trees, under the leaves. Have them sit quietly at a distance and observe. Shut eyes and listen, smell, feel the air.
- Comparison - how are the squirrels the same, different, is there more than one type of squirrel.
- Describing - introduction of new vocabulary, encouraging kids to use new vocabulary.
- Recording knowledge with drawings and print and art.

Completing the KWL chart

During the week continue to read non-fiction and fiction squirrel books to the children.

Record their questions and what they have learned on the KWL chart.

Children may ask:

- What do squirrels eat?
- Do squirrels bite?
- Where do squirrels live?
- Do squirrels have babies?
- Why do squirrels have big bushy tails?
- Can squirrels swim?

Squirrel Vocabulary

cache - To store food in times of surplus for times when food is less plentiful

cheek pouch - Are the pockets on both sides of the head of some mammals between the jaw and the cheek that allow the rapid collection of food and also serve as temporary storage and transport

drey - A leafy nest made of branches and leaves about the size of a basketball

habitat - An area that an organism needs to survive, providing food, water and shelter

hibernation - A state of inactivity during the winter

forage - to search for food, in the wild, squirrels search for tree seeds (pine cones); mushrooms, buds, catkins, flowers and berries

mammal - An animal with the following combination of characteristics, fur or hair, female gives birth to live young, female feeds young milk from her body

midden - A storage pile of conifer cones and seeds and/or a refuse heap where squirrels have been feeding.

predator - an animal that is trying to eat another animal

rodent - A group of mammals that has two sets of incisors, one pair on the upper jaw and the other on the lower jaw that they use for gnawing

scurry - A group of squirrels

tree squirrel - A squirrel that spends most of its life in the trees as opposed to a ground dwelling squirrel, also called an arboreal squirrel

Scampering Squirrel Art

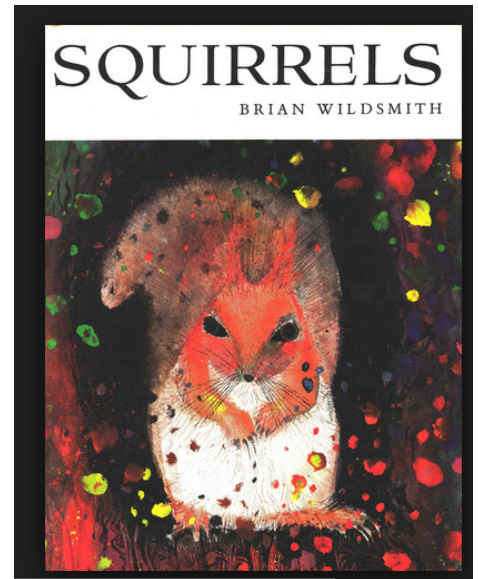
1. Making the papers

You will need

- Paint in autumn colors
- Optional: Gold glitter paint, black paint, scraping objects
- Brushes
- Two 8.5 x 11 sheets of thin cardstock per child

Procedure

If you can obtain a copy of Brian Wildsmith's, "Squirrels", it's a wonderful book. The pictures are a great inspiration for making the papers below, and the book is full of wonderful information about squirrels.



1. Have each child make 2 sheets of autumn colored paper.

- Depending on how many students in your class, plan for a couple of days of learning center times for all children to complete the papers.
- Students put their names on the backs of their papers.
- Students cover their 2 papers with bright colored paints and let dry.
- Optional: Students experiment with gold, glitter paint and/or different objects to scrape the paint or to make blobs.
- As children paint their papers, ask questions about the painting process.

What do you notice about the paint?

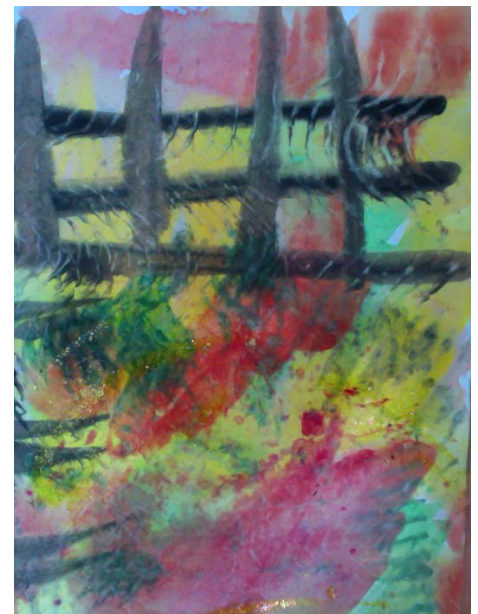
What would happen if you...?

What happens if you mix...?

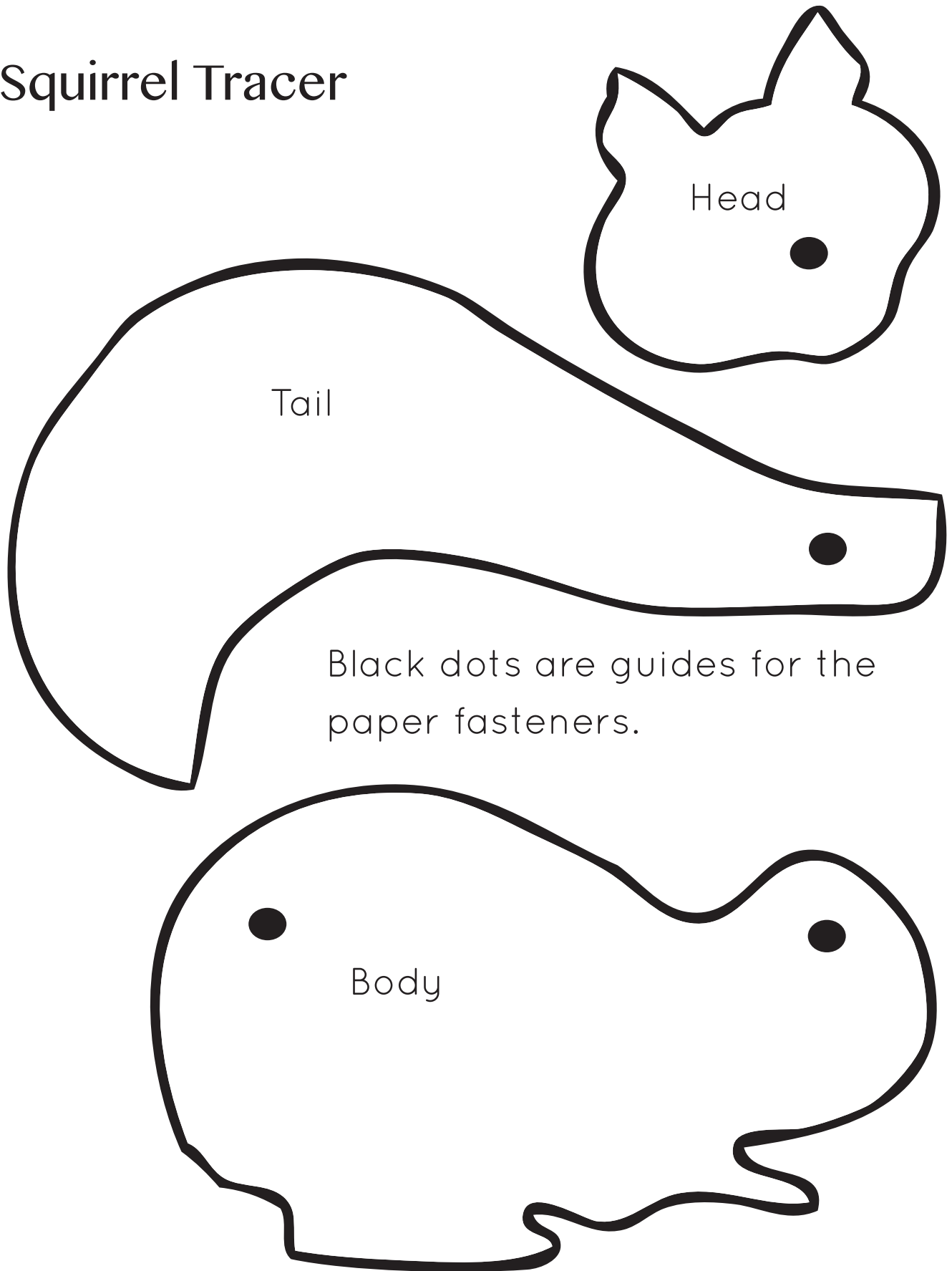
I wonder why the glitter paint is so sparkly?

I'm curious about what you're doing...

How...? Why...? What if...?



Squirrel Tracer



Black dots are guides for the paper fasteners.

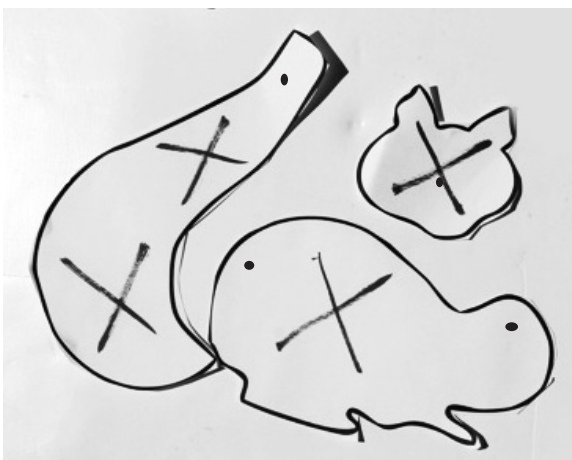
2 - Making the Squirrels

You will need

- Photocopy the squirrel tracers on page 7 onto lightweight card and cut out enough for students to use at center time.
- Tracers for children - Mark the tracers with large Xs, as in picture to avoid kids using them for crafts
- Scissors and dark, thick, markers
- Brass fasteners, 2 per child

Procedure

- Teach the students early in the year that shapes with a large X are called tracers. Show them how to trace (not all children have done this before)
- Children place the body, tail and head of the squirrel tracers on the back of one of their painted sheets of papers. (They will fit on one piece but the other is just in case).
- Children trace around the squirrel tracers with a dark, thick marker
- Children cut out the squirrel body pieces
- Students place the cut out body parts approximately where the black dots are on the tracer and attach the head and tail to the body with 2 brass fasteners (teacher may have to help)
- Optional - attach the head brass fastener to be the nose (see finished image on right below)
- Children draw eyes, nose, mouth, whiskers on their squirrels



Focus Question & Answer Activity

Turn a square of paper into a "question and answer recording sheet". Use the math terms, triangle and square as you demonstrate how to make it.

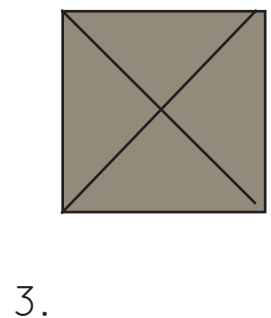
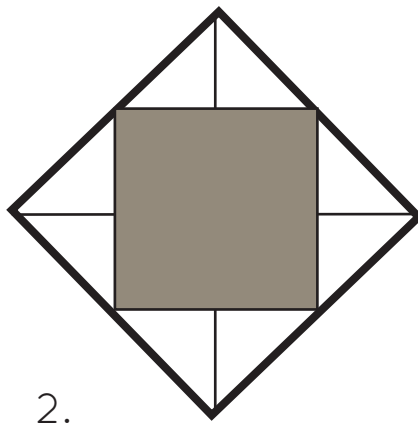
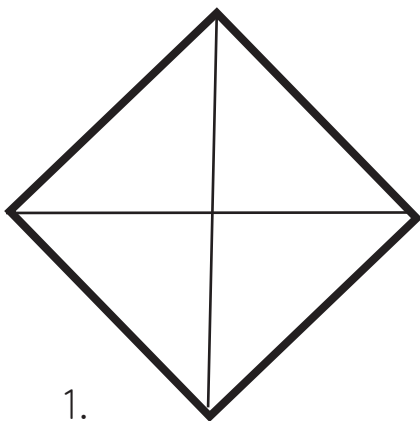
You will need:

- 8 inch by 8 inch white paper squares
- 2 or 3 six inch cardboard squares per table to share
- Markers and crayons

Procedure for making the recording sheet:

Children fold their square paper over a square of card (instructions below).

1. Place a square of paper on a table so it looks like a diamond.
2. Fold the paper square in half making a triangle, then fold in half again, then open - image #1.
3. Put the cardboard square on top of the paper, like in image #2.
4. Fold the triangles over the card, making sharp creases, then open the paper and remove the card.
5. Refold all four triangles so the paper looks like image #3.



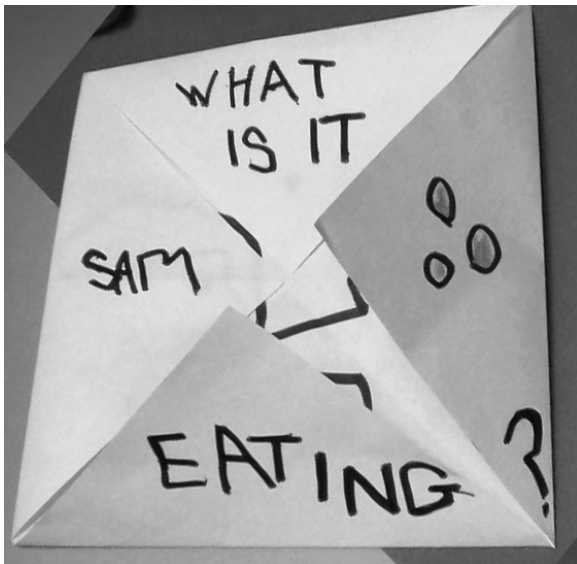
Questions & Answers Continued

Procedure for recording questions and answers

Children print their name and their squirrel question on the front triangles
Inside, children answer their squirrel question with a drawing and words inside.

- Have children draw with one dark felt marker, then color in with crayons. This makes it easier to recognize their finished work.
- Students sound out and print the answer to their question, depending on their ability.

Students take turns reading their questions and answers to the class or to a group of students.



Outside - children print their question and their name.



Inside - children print their answer and draw a picture.

Two Squirrel Stories

Jo Macdonald Hiked in the Woods, 2013 by Mary Quattlebaum (Author), Laura J. Bryant (Illustrator)

Jo goes along with her grandfather for a walk in the woods on his farm, and is followed by a squirrel. The book combines song and listening as Jo and grandpa discover what's in their woods.

A Squirrel's Story: A True Tale Paperback, 2013 by Jana Bommersbach (Author), Jeff Yesh (Illustrator)

Shirlee Squirrel needs a safe nest for her babies. They move into a birdhouse and she teaches her young everything gray tree squirrels need to know.

If creating learning environments that are places of inquiry, exploration, and problem solving is new to you, you may find my ebook, "Challenging Children to Investigate With Everyday Things", a great introduction.

Replacing worksheets with recording sheets can be overwhelming. The ebook shows you how to use common objects for learning experiences and how to get organized for simple weekly lessons. And best of all, if you're just starting out, you'll find 39 detailed activities with 50 recording sheets to start you on your way. If you're interested, check it out on the store link below or copy and paste the following url into your address bar.

<http://www.kindergarten-lessons.com/ebook/>

