Create a Critter

WHAT YOU’LL NEED
- Drawing and coloring materials (markers, crayons, colored pencils)
- Paper (for drawing)
- Photos or magazines of all kinds of animals (fish, insects, reptiles, birds, mammals)

WHAT TO DO

Remember: The purpose is NOT to teach a specific topic but to help children experience the excitement of science exploration!

GETTING READY

Lay out pictures of various animals that show their adaptations (long-necked giraffes; animals with claws for climbing, defense or catching prey; animals with large eyes or ears, colors for camouflage, etc.).

LET’S GO

1. Observe the pictures of the various animals. What do you observe about an animal that makes it the same as another animal? What makes the animal different from another animal? How might the animals’ differences help them survive? Might they help it get food easier? Might they protect it from animals that might try to eat it? Might they help the animals move around better? What does looking at the animal tell you about where it might live?

   Explain that these differences are called adaptations, and that they help an animal survive in the wild.

2. Ask the children to draw their own creatures with adaptations. Encourage them to be creative with their creatures. What adaptations does your creature have? Why did you draw that animal? What will help the animal survive? Where might your animal live? How does it move? If it lived in another part of the world or in another environment, what different adaptations would it need? What does it eat? Why is it that color? Why is it that shape?

3. Ask the children to group their animals. Then ask the children why they grouped the animals the way they did. (They can group them according to any number of characteristics: number of legs, where they live, whether they have feathers, color, what they eat or other characteristics discussed).
**TALK IT OVER**

*How did you decide what kind of critter to make?*

*What kinds of characteristics does your critter have? Why did you choose those?*

*Which critter do you think would thrive in Michigan? Why?*

**GOOD TO KNOW**

**Older students:**

Discuss reproductive adaptations, such as how animals might find a mate, the tradeoffs between producing a large number versus a small number of offspring, and competition for mates and nesting habitats. We’ve been talking about animals. Do plants have adaptations that help them survive and reproduce? Why do cacti have spines? Why do some flowers smell good?

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND IT**

ALL organisms need four keys things in their environment: food, water, shelter (safety) and space (for example, hunting or nesting territories). Animals and plants are adapted to a particular environment. Adaptations enable them to better meet these key needs, improving their ability to access food, avoid predators, reproduce, and resist disease and environmental stresses (such as severe weather).