

Animal for the Week (Alternate every 2 weeks)

Raccoon

The raccoon is a small mammal that can be found just about anywhere in North America. A raccoon is easily identifiable by its famous bandit-like mask on its face, thus giving them the nick name “bandit-masked raccoon.” Because they have been notorious for raiding garbage cans & gardens. They have sometimes been referred to as little thieves. Raccoons are about the size of a small dog, ranging in weight from twelve to thirty-five pounds. Their tail makes up nearly half their body length.

Raccoons have five fingers just like people! Raccoons have great *dexterity* in their paws, so much that they can even open things like jars, bottles, *latches*, and they can even untie shoelaces! Surprisingly they are also very smart, with a high IQ. In one study, researchers found that raccoons can even unlock *combination* locks, meaning they have memorization capabilities. They can also rotate their back feet 180 degrees, which allows them to climb down from a tree head first! They will climb as high as forty feet! Interestingly though, they have poor eye sight and are *colorblind*. It is their great sense of smell and hearing that helps them explore the world.

Scientists have found that raccoons can make up to fifty-one *sounds!* While they do make sounds, raccoons are *solitary* animals. They will communicate with another raccoon when they come across one, but do not interact with each other on a regular basis. They will come together to mate. The only social group among raccoons, is the mother and her babies.

Habitat

Raccoons can be found in the forest, prairies, wetlands, but can also be found in the inner city! They are very *adaptable*. Raccoons will make their homes in parts of *hollowed* out trees and other burrows in the natural world. But when found in the city, will live in any opportunistic place they can find.

Raccoons are *nocturnal*, which means they are most active at night. They are most active in the spring, summer and fall. They don't hibernate but sleep longer periods of time in the winter months. Raccoons are *omnivores*, eating both plants and other small animals and fish. In the wild, they tend to stay near the water to forage for their food. When raccoons live in the city however, they tend to dig in gardens and make a mess out of garbage cans to find their food! *If you were a raccoon, where would you prefer to live? What would you eat?*

Learning!

Video: Nat Geo's Raccoons video.nationalgeographic.com/video/raccoon

Have students watch the short video about raccoons and take notes. As a class students can discuss something they've learned or liked about the video.

Books:

Rascal by Sterling North

Raccoons: (Blastoff! Readers: Backyard Wildlife) by Emily K. Green

Teacher can read with students either book and discuss what they have learned. Allow students, particularly younger, to have fun and even animate raccoons and things they are learning during the story.