

LESSON | ANIMAL COMMUNICATION CLUES

Introduce the discoveries of animal behaviorists—and challenge your students to use observation to interpret nonverbal cues!

OBJECTIVE

Students will observe the differences between verbal and nonverbal communication and analyze a reading passage about animal behavior.

STANDARDS

Common Core ELA

RI.3.2, 4.2, 5.2

Determine the main idea

RI.3.1 Answer questions to show understanding of a text

RI.4.1 Refer to details in a text when explaining it

W.3-5.3.B Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to show the response of characters to situations.

SEL

Distinguish between nonverbal and verbal cues and messages

TIME

45 minutes

Plus time for skit prep and presentation

MATERIALS

Find Out What Animals Are “Saying” activity sheet

1 Doctor Dolittle has the power to talk to animals, but how do the rest of us know what animals are communicating? Ask your class: *Can you ever tell what animals are thinking or feeling?* Have them share things a pet may “tell” us without words. Then read the prompts below and have students suggest what each action may be communicating:

- **Gorilla beating his chest:** a threatening gesture, warning others to back off.
- **Dog bowing down on her front paws:** a friendly gesture that invites other dogs to play.
- **Ostrich crouching low, waving his wings:** a courtship gesture, intended to attract a partner.

2 As a scientist, Doctor Dolittle also relies on observation to learn about animals. Explain that **observation** is an important scientific tool for scientists known as behaviorists, who study animal behavior to interpret what animals may be thinking and feeling. Have students brainstorm interesting animal observations that they’ve made in their everyday lives (e.g., birds flying in a V formation, ants working as a team, squirrels gathering nuts, etc.).

3 Remind students that humans are animals too. Although we communicate through speech, we also give a lot of clues about what we are thinking and how we are feeling through facial expressions, body language, and other signals. Ask students to record observations and interpretations, just like

a behaviorist (and Doctor Dolittle) would, as you demonstrate nonverbal cues: eye rolling, waving hello, smiling, arms crossed, sighing, jumping excitedly. Have them predict what emotion you were trying to communicate with each cue.

4 Distribute the Find Out What Animals Are “Saying” activity sheet. Have students read and answer the questions.

5 Wrap up by having student groups write and perform skits that include examples of verbal and nonverbal human communication. Ask peers to play the role of behaviorists and report their observations at the end.

Activity Sheet Answer Key: 1. a) sugar glider/hiss, giraffe/humming, polar bear/chuffing, b) gorilla/warning scent, c) polar bear/paws and muzzle, d) giraffe/stare. 2. Sugar gliders, gorillas, polar bears, and giraffes all use communication for protection; polar bears also use it to teach survival skills. 3. Animals communicate in many nonverbal ways in order to help themselves, their family, or their species survive and flourish.



BRAIN BREAK

Challenge students to put themselves in order (e.g., line up from youngest to oldest or alphabetically by first name) without speaking and using only nonverbal clues.

Continue the animal chatter on social media @DolittleMovie.

Name _____

Find Out What Animals Are “Saying”

Doctor Dolittle talks to animals. But real-life scientists learn about animals by observing their behavior. Discover more below, then answer the questions.

Silent Alarm

When male silverback gorillas are under threat, they give off a very specific smell. The scent can be detected at a distance. It warns the gorilla’s troop of danger without making a sound.

Stone-Cold Stare

Giraffes were once thought to be silent animals. It turns out they communicate through a very quiet humming sound, but only with other giraffes. So when face-to-face with a predator, a giraffe will stare it down with its large eyes. This warns the other animal to back off.

Life Lessons

Polar bears are solitary animals. That means they spend most of their lives living on their own. To prepare her cub for solitary life in the tundra habitat, a mother polar bear uses her paws, her muzzle, and a “chuffing” sound to discourage dangerous behavior and teach important life skills.

Hiss Alert

Sugar gliders live in groups, and they make their nests in trees. When they are under attack by predators, they attract friends by making a hissing sound. A group is safer than being alone! They also make a chattering sound when they are happy.

YOUR TURN

Answer the questions on separate paper.

- Describe an example of animal communication that relies on:
 - Sound
 - Scent
 - Touch
 - Sight
- Choose two examples of animal communication. Explain how each example helps the animal to survive.
- Summarize the main idea of the text.



STAR SCIENTISTS

These three famous behavioral scientists observed animals in their habitats and made some amazing discoveries.

JANE GOODALL

Tool Kit

Chimpanzees make tools for eating and grooming.

KARL VON FRISCH

Super Navigation

Bees use the sun as a compass.

KONRAD LORENZ

Imprinting

Baby geese might choose foster parents of a different species.