



## AFTERSCHOOL EXCHANGE ACTIVITY

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### TRAIL OF THE COUGAR

#### PREPARATION

##### **Grade Levels:** 4-6

This activity would be most effective if delivered in five separate periods of 45 minutes to an hour, with a group of no more than twelve students.

##### **Prerequisite:**

The group leader should tape and review NATURE: TRAIL OF THE COUGAR, planning when to start and stop the tape. The video is one hour; twenty five minutes are shown in this activity.

##### **Materials:**

Students will need:

- loose leaf paper
- dictionaries (as many as possible)
- poster paper
- markers, colored pencils
- pencils
- nature related magazines
- glue
- other art supplies such as: watercolors, cotton balls, small sticks

Group Leader will need:

- Chart paper
- Marker
- World Map
- Vocabulary words and definitions, each on a separate piece of paper from handout #1

##### **Academic Goals:**

- Children will learn about cougar behavior, habitat, social organization, efforts to support their survival and threats to it
- Children will practice using the dictionary
- Children will learn new and reinforce previously-learned science vocabulary terms
- Children will carry out independent non-fiction reading and research

- Children will creatively present information about cougars in written and visual forms, drawing from a variety of sources (class discussion, video, texts, Internet)

**Social Goals:**

- Children will work in small groups to compare information, coordinate together to write it up and present to class
- Children will have an opportunity to view one another's work and comment on it.

**STEPS**

**Activity 1**

**Introduction** (10 minutes):

Ask the children to write down what they know about cougars. Prompt them by providing categories of information such as: their environment, behavior, population. Solicit their responses and writes on chart paper posted on the classroom wall. Then, ask the children what additional information they would like to know about cougars, and writes responses on another piece of paper.

Tell the children they will be watching a couple of segments from an episode of the NATURE series called "Trail of the Cougar" in order to learn more about cougars. Pass out the first handout to help them organize material they will learn. Go over the handout with the children to make sure they understand it. They will complete the questions and vocabulary matching after watching the video. The definitions will be completed as a class group.

**Learning Activities** (35 – 45 minutes):

1. Play the first segment of the video (first 5 minutes, ending with line: "They often inhabit a remote mountainous landscape, making them extremely hard to find, even for an expert outdoorsman.")
2. Have children answer the questions and vocabulary matching sections. Go over the answers to the questions together as a class. Have a child point out on the map the geographic locations of cougars in the past and present. Next, post the vocabulary words and definitions in a random order on the wall. Ask children to volunteer to come up to the front of the class to match a word with its definition. If no one in the class knows the meaning of a word, have children compete to see who can look it up first in the dictionary. As the children are completing this exercise, connect vocabulary with its relation to cougars.
3. Next, write these words on chart paper: Habitat, Extinct, and Conservation. Ask children to define those words: If they don't know, ask children to look up the words and read the meaning out loud while the leader writes the definition on the chart paper and

children write on their handouts. Tell children that next session they will watch longer segments about the cougar.

## **Activity 2**

**Introduction** (10 minutes):

1. Have children compare what they learned from the video (handout) with what they listed (classroom wall) in terms of what they know and want to know about cougars. Discuss if any of their questions were answered or knowledge proved incorrect.
2. Briefly go over some of the vocabulary words from the previous activity to reinforce. Pass out handout #2 and tell children they will watch three segments from the program and after each one they will complete a section on the sheet.

**Learning Activities** (45 minutes; 25 minutes of video):

1. The first segment is about cougar habitat and behavior in the wild and captivity. (15 minutes from beginning of video, starting with: "In their natural habitat, cougars are remarkably solitary animals." Running time: 9 minutes). Have students write their answers on the handout. Tell children they can continue to add to these lists while watching the next two video sections as well.
2. Continue the video about cougars in Florida ("In southern Florida cougars live in a wilderness area surrounded by dense human development." Running time: 7 minutes). Have students write their answers to this section and any additional information relating to section one. Continue the video about cougars in Yellowstone Park ("Loss of habitat is a critical problem for cougars in many areas." Running time: 9 minutes) and have students write answers to this section as well as information regarding the first section.

## **Activity 3**

**Learning Activities** (45 minutes – hour):

1. Divide the children into four groups and pass out a piece of easel paper and markers to each one. Tell each group they are in charge of writing on the paper the answers to their section of the handout (habitat, behavior and social organization, Florida, Yellowstone). Then ask groups to present information to the larger group, and point out relevant geographic areas on the map (southern Florida, Wyoming).
2. Alternately, the group leader can have children report on their answers to the handout instead of breaking into groups. If conducted this way, four children can write the answers to each section on a piece of posted chart paper while the class discusses each answer.

3. Next, introduce the culminating project: making a poster about cougars to educate others about them and threats to their survival. Children will use what they have learned from the video and handouts. They can also find additional information in non-fiction books relating to what they wanted to know about cougars (refer to list generated in Activity 1). Potential books include:

- *The Snow Cats* (1997) Perry, P. Franklin Watts: CT
- *Cougars* (1997) Stone, L. Lerner Publications: MN
- *The Florida Panther* (1997) Silverstein, A. and V., L. Silverstein Nunn. Millbrook Press: CT
- *Outside and Inside Big Cats* (2003) Markle, S. Simon and Shuster: NY

Children can also search Web sites for information. They can begin with the public television Web site and go to others:

**NATURE: TRAIL OF THE COUGAR**

[www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/cougar/index.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/cougar/index.html)

**FLORIDA: PANTHER NET**

<http://www.panther.state.fl.us>

**THE MOUNTAIN LION FOUNDATION**

[www.mountainlion.org](http://www.mountainlion.org)

**PUMA**

<http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/agarman/puma.htm>

**FRIENDS OF THE FLORIDA PANTHER REFUGE**

<http://www.floridapanther.org>

4. Children should begin to plan their poster and write the information in pencil. Encourage children to think about how they can visually represent cougars and the information they learned in addition to writing.

**Activity 4** (45 minutes to an hour):

Children should continue to plan their posters. Once the group leader has looked over the plans and encouraged children to add information as necessary, the child can work on the poster using markers and multimedia materials. For children who have finished before the others, they can read texts about cougars and/or search internet sites to read more about them. Once each child has completed a poster, the group leader will post them around the room.

**Activity 5** (45 minutes to an hour):

1. Children should walk around the room and read the posters. As they do so, they write down on a piece of paper something they liked about each of the posters and five new facts they learned about cougars as a result of doing this project (number of facts can vary, as desired). Information can be from any of the sources – video, discussion, books, Internet.
2. Positively critique each poster, with input from the children. Have children share what they have learned, write on chart paper, and compare again with the list they originally generated about what they wanted to know about cougars. Decide on a location to post the posters in the after school program or exhibition area so other children and adults can learn from them. Make a heading for the posters and a label with each child's name under his/her poster.

# **TRAIL OF THE COUGAR**

## **HANDOUT #1**

**Part I: Answer the following questions based on information from the video.**

What peoples considered the cougars sacred?

What are the different names for cougars?

Where do they live today?

Why did people hunt cougars?

Can you hunt them today? Why or why not?

How many cougars were there in the United States in 1960?  
How many are there now?

Name a characteristic of cougar behavior:

Where do they live in nature?

**Part II: Match the vocabulary word with its meaning:**

Solitary	the state of being held confined to a particular place
Feline	objectionable animal
Tawny	being, going, or living alone without companions
Vermin	skin of an animal with its fur
Remote	one that hunts animals for rewards offered
Mammal	to recover from a setback; spring back
Urban sprawl	relating to cats or the cat family
Bounty hunters	brownish orange to light brown color
Rebound	class of individuals with common attributes, known by a common name
Pelt	far removed, out of the way, distant
Captivity	animals that feed their young with milk and have skin covered with hair
Species	spreading of urban developments such as houses and shopping malls on undeveloped land

**Part III: Write the definitions of:**

Habitat:

Extinct:

Conservation:

# **TRAIL OF THE COUGAR**

## **HANDOUT #2**

### **Segment I: Cougars in the Wild and Captivity**

The habitat of cougars:

Characteristics of cougar behavior and social organization:

### **Segment II: Cougars in Florida**

What are cougars called in this area of the country?

What distinguishes them from cougars?

How many are there in Florida?

What are people doing to help make sure they survive?

What are the threats to their survival?

Trail of the Cougar handout #2, page 2

**Segment III: Cougars in Yellowstone National Park**

What are cougars called in this part of the United States?

What is the main threat to their survival in this area?

Describe the project that conservation scientists are conducting in the park.

Why are they doing it and what do they hope to learn?