

Form and Function



Skeletons tell stories

KLAs:
Science

LESSON TOPIC: Form and function of
animal skeletons

YEAR LEVEL: K-6

DURATION OF ACTIVITY: 45-50 minutes

Animals have two very different sides to them: the outside that we see when we observe them in nature, and the inside; which is usually not seen. However, in a museum, both of these sides to animals can be observed next to each other. We can explore the relationships between the outer appearance, and what we know about the ecology of animals, and their skeleton using specimens in the Natural History Museum.

This activity uncovers these relationships in two key ways using the museum specimens:

- Observation of key features of skeletons: Students will consider, discuss, and explore whole and sections of skeletons to uncover how they work, and what they can tell us about the ecology and appearance of the animal;
- Creative reconstruction of animals through pencil illustration. Students will examine the skeleton of an animal, making inferences about where the animal lived and what it ate, with students drawing what they think the live animal looked like.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Appreciate the importance of museum collections as a scientific resource, why we collect skeletons and taxidermy skins, and what they can tell us
- Develop knowledge and understanding of relationships between the appearance and ecology of a live animal, and its skeleton

- Understand how different animals can have very similar structures, reflecting for similar life modes
- Develop skills in scientific illustration, through free-hand pencil drawing, and critical thinking in the reconstruction process

EXPLORATORY AND PLAY-BASED COMPONENTS

This activity combines scientific enquiry with natural science and observation. Students will have an opportunity to inspect skeletons and match them to the whole animals they belong to. They will examine parts of different skeletons to infer possible modes of life, such as what an animal eats and how it moves. Students will then head into the museum to do their own reconstructions of skeletons, and discover that sometimes skeletons look nothing like the animals they belong to! Students will use the museum in a play and inquiry-based exploration of the natural world, comparing and contrasting animals with and without skin.

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