



Otter Steals Fish

This high energy, yet contained game can fit well at the start of the day to get the group going. With participants being drawn into the characters of cheeky otters or the patient heron, they love this game, all the while developing their agility, sneakiness and awareness.

Primer

The patient heron has brought his catch to land for processing, however opportunistic otters are waiting in the rushes to see if they can get an easy meal. Here are some facts you may want at your fingertips to inspire players about animals featuring in this game:

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

- Adult's wingspan ranges from 175-195cm, nearly 2 metres!
- Diet - lots of fish, small birds including ducklings, even small mammals like voles and amphibians
- Herons struggle in harsh winters when ponds and lakes are frozen. Mild winters of recent years have helped boost population numbers
- Herons can wait for up to 3 hours or even more, neck coiled and loaded to attack prey

Ages

6 years + (adults love this too!)

Duration

5-10 minutes minimum. Some groups enjoy this game for up to an hour not wanting to stop.

How To

- Prime your players with imagining the scene of the heron who has been fishing for hours and the opportunistic hungry otters who have come to try their luck
- Set up a circle boundary around 6-8 metres in diameter (we often use the children's backpacks but a long rope on the ground, or other objects would work fine)
- Remind the heron that they are to guard their fish but they are not allowed to touch the fish whilst the game is in play. They can stop an otter stealing their fish by tagging the otter (gentle but clear tags)
- Remind the otters that the aim of the game for them is to get in, grab the fish and get out of the circle with it without being tagged by the heron.

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- Consequences - these can change depending what variation you play. The simplest is that if an otter is tagged, they go to the boundary and count to 10 before trying again.
- If an otter successfully steals the fish, they can become the next heron.

Equipment Needed

- Boundary objects
- 'Fish' - we use a bandana (anything small and soft works though like a woolly hat)

Playing Environment

Any open space: grass playing field, leafy woodland floor. Ideally without trip hazards including brambles, roots or rocks.

Variations

Different consequences for being tagged by the heron

- Run and touch a nearby tree (or a bench etc, whatever is in the landscape)
- Freeze (unfreeze if the heron accidentally tags you again)

Two herons in the middle each guarding their own fish. This works well with larger groups to spread the play and keep everyone engaged. It can be good to start with one first and then introduce another and expand the play area a little at the same time.

Teacher Tricks and Tips

We have found it best for a facilitator to start as the first Heron. Look out for children carrying on after an otter has a failed attempt to take the stolen fish out of the circle. It's good to all pause here, go back to the boundary and restart the game.

Invisible Learning

- Agility and feeling fully alive
- Proprioception - body position and movement while keeping balance
- Understanding that different species can interact in this way
- Opportunities to drop in facts about grey herons and otters in your primer
- Opportunity to practice being a heron at the beginning (lifting one leg and stirring your toe on the water to 'lure' in a fish - similar skill to develop fox walking)
- Opportunity to introduce 'owl eyes' for the heron to help them guard their fish more effectively.

Hazards to Highlight

- Otters bumping heads or colliding - highlight the need to be aware of each other
- The heron being too in character and tagging too hard or near eyes

Risk Assessment Considerations

These are the risk assessment consideration documents to be referred to for this activity.

- High energy circle games
- Site risk assessment (specific to your site)

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Links

- Fox Walking
- Owl Eyes
- Foxes' Tails - another high energy circle game

Tags

- Circle games
- Warm up games
- Animal games
- Grass Field Games

