



Steal the Spines from the Hedgehog

This is a wonderful, classic game that goes by many names including deer stalk and fox the fox. It is especially helpful to shift the energy of a group to a slower, quieter, more aware state. Throughout the game, those who are quietest and who make the least disturbance do well, with the blind guard developing their sense of hearing. It is a perfect game in which to apply and practise core sensory routines for nature connection of: fox walking, owl eyes and deer ears.

Primer

Imagine there was a magical hedgehog who dwelled in a secret place. During this season, the hedgehog hibernated but he had a blind guard for protection as his spines were highly sought after. It is said that a spine stealthily taken from the hedgehog would be rewarded with a nature wish. With nature wishes, it's said they'll come true but rarely right away – they'll come true at some point in your lifetime, so wish for something you'd value whether you're 8 or 88!

Variations of this game were played by children in many indigenous cultures – some used this game as a form of developing skills and would then progress to stalking up to deer and plucking a hair before they are noticed, or even better, getting away unnoticed!

Ages

3 years +

Duration

10-30mins

How To

- Prime players with a quick story to inspire them as above. Make it clear that the aim of the game is for participants to sneak in, steal a stick (or other object) and sneak back out without being detected by the blindfold guard. There is no running in this game – only stealthy sneaking!
- Set up the playing space by all gathering a couple of handfuls of leaves and a stick about as long as their forearm. These materials can be shaped into a 'woodland hedgehog' with the blind guard sitting just behind.
- From the centre all participants can take 15 steps out from the middle and either leave a backpack at their starting point or make a scuff mark so they know when they've got back to where they started.

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- You as the facilitator can invite participants in with hand signals, a few at a time, so it is manageable for the blind guard.
- The blind guard can stop another participant who is in play by pointing directly at them with the facilitator acting as referee standing just behind the blind guard to clearly see if it were a hit or miss.
- If a participant is 'hit' by the blind guard's pointing, then they can walk out to the starting boundary and wait for another turn. If the blind guard points inaccurately or to empty space, the facilitator can say 'miss'.
- It can be helpful especially when a group is new to this game to limit the number of 'misses' the blind guard gets to prevent them pointing all over the place. This helps them tune in more and focus their hearing.
- After a quick round, congratulate any who stole a stick and remind them their skills have been rewarded by a nature wish. By now you'll know how challenging the environment was for the sneakers that time. It's a great time to remind them of fox walking and how cats stalk to help them slow down and get more success on the next round.

Equipment Needed

- Blindfold for guard (2 if with a bigger group)
- Objects to be stolen – in a woodland setting with this hedgehog primer it is fun to create a woodland hedgehog out of a leaf pile and sticks poked in. You could also just lay out bandanas around the guard or have a pot of cutlery for extra challenge.

Variations

It can be helpful, when refereeing the game, not to also have to be aware of who needs a turn being invited in. A good solution for this is to put the children in pairs (or in a bigger group 3s) and have them take it in turns in their groups to reduce the number of children sneaking in at once in a self-managed way.

You can encourage children to embody some stealthy animals, moving from fox walking to stalking in on all fours. Cats are a great animal to aspire to, especially as they stalk with direct register where the back feet land in the space the front feet are just leaving ensuring the ground is already clear and compact.

In summer it's fun for the blind guard to have a basic water pistol to squirt sneakers with (instead of direct pointing) when they hear them getting close.

Playing Environment

This game is best suited to a woodland environment so there is challenging terrain to move quietly upon. It can however be adapted and played in almost any environment including fields, playgrounds and even classrooms.

Teacher Tricks and Tips

Watch out for children clearing pathways in the leaves to make for quieter terrain, remind them that this is about developing their skills.

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Watch out for children throwing an object to create a diversionary sound.

It is helpful to have participants spread out so that one isn't right in front of another. Otherwise one of them could make a sound that causes the other to get out.

This game can be a great incentive to take shoes and socks off especially in warmer weather.

Invisible Learning

- Develops sensory awareness of all players
- Develops proprioception for the stalkers
- Develops self-control in being quiet for long periods of time.

Hazards to Highlight

- If you're playing with bare feet, just check the terrain for hazards underfoot such as sweet chestnut spines.

Risk Assessment Considerations

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

- Risk assess individuals in your group for any additional needs as some children struggle to cope with being quiet for this long and could disrupt the game if they don't have support.
- Site risk assessment (specific to your site)
- Otherwise this is such a slow game, it's one of the safest out there!

Links

- Fox Walking
- Owl Eyes
- Deer Ears

Tags:

- Circle games
- Sensory Awareness
- Sneaking

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