

Squirrels on the Run

Activity

Resource:

Beyond the Walls: Activities for the Outdoors

Grade(s): 7 8

Division(s): Intermediate

Setting: Curricular

Season: Fall

Activity Goal

Participants must work together and apply strategies and tactics to evade capture by predators and avoid disease while they gather and store food (implements) for winter in a fall environment.

For participant safety, please review the contents of the [Beyond the Walls: Safety Considerations](#) page for information on Safety Standards, Fall Safety Considerations, and Outdoor Playing Areas and Surfaces.

Equipment

- 6-8 blue pinnies
- 5 hoops
- 4 large cones/pylons
- 4 of each of: balls, cones/pylons, scarves, pins, discs, or any other small manipulative equipment (food for squirrels to gather)

- 2-4 red pinnies

Before Play

- Review the safety rules and activity instructions with participants prior to the activity.
- Establish the boundaries for the designated playing area and share them with participants.
- Determine a large, rectangular playing area with participants, and mark the boundaries using the 4 cones/pylons.
- Place a hoop in each corner, and one in the middle of the playing area. Explain to participants that each corner hoop represents the 'nest' of a family of squirrels, and that the implements scattered around the playing area represent food items. The middle hoop represents the disease hoop.
- Consider providing some squirrels an initial store of food to ensure all participants can participate equitably.
- Divide the group into four squirrel families, and designate 1 participant as a 'predator', such as an owl. Give this participant a blue pinnie to wear.
- Discuss the feeding relationship between predators and prey and how squirrels and owls are representative of this relationship.
- Designate 2-4 participants as 'disease' and provide them with a red pinnie to wear. Explain that all animals must avoid disease, as it can weaken, or even decimate an animal population. Encourage participants to share their knowledge of disease.
- Instruct participants that their goal is to evade capture and gather as much food for their nest as they can during the activity, but that they can only gather one food item at a time. A squirrel family may not prevent or block other squirrels from entering their hoop to gather food.
- Explain to participants that squirrels must avoid owls, and not get tagged. If they do, they must don a blue pinnie and 'become a predator'. If a squirrel or owl is tagged by disease, they must drop any food they have, and go directly to the hoop in the middle. They must perform 10 repetitions of a pre-selected activity such as one from [Ophea's 50 Fitness Activities](#) before returning to their family.
- Ensure all participants are aware of running with their head up, and aware of their surroundings, as play will be happening in multiple directions.

During Play

- Direct squirrels to accumulate as much 'food' for winter as possible, both from the nests of other squirrels, and that which is in the open playing area.
- Encourage them to evade being captured by both predators and disease by moving evasively in the playing area.
- Remind squirrels (participants) tagged by owls (blue pinnies) to get a blue pinnie and become a predator as well.
- Remind all participants that a tag is a touch on the back, shoulder, or arms and not a push, punch, or grab.
- At the end of the activity (designated by the teacher), each squirrel family counts the food items in their hoop. The family with the most food items is the winner.

After Play

Use the following prompts for participants to reflect on ways to be active in fall and engage others in activity to build a habit of engaging in outdoor activity throughout the year.

Question prompts:

- How do you think this game symbolizes what happens in food webs and predator-prey-disease relationships?
- What did the accumulation of equipment symbolize for the squirrel population in this game? How does this relate to what happens in nature?
- When you were playing, what did you do that kept yourself and others safe given the nature of this particular game?
- What strategies did you use to successfully gather food while evading predators and disease?

Adaptations

Consider these tips to maximize the challenge and the fun for participants.

- Consider having participants captured by 'disease' perform a predetermined number of an activity such as one from Ophea's 50 Fitness Activities to re-enter play.
- Consider having multiple types of predators or multiple types of diseases, the consequences of being caught by which range from getting 'out', to becoming a predator, to performing additional fitness activities, to re-enter play.

Modifications

Consider these tips to maximize inclusion and fun for all participants.

- For participants with dexterity issues, consider providing a variety of implements for participants to choose from.
- For those participants that are blind/low vision, consider using larger implements, or brightly coloured implements. Alternatively, tie a bell to each participant so they can be heard as they move.
- For participants with mobility issues, consider having the entire group use a different locomotion between nests, or mandate 'walking speed' if the terrain is uneven.