

Grade 3 Informational

Animal Tracks in Nebraska

When people walk in wet sand or snow, they leave footprints. Animals also leave footprints called tracks. Many animals live in Nebraska. Dogs, cats, cows, and sheep are easy to see. Other animals are good at hiding from people. You won't see them, but if you look carefully, you might see their tracks.

Deer have brown fur and a short, white tail. Although deer are large, they are difficult to see. They move quickly and quietly, hiding in tall grasses or behind trees. Deer eat twigs and bark from trees and corn from fields. Deer are common in Nebraska. That means there are many of them. Deer have hooves, which leave deep tracks shaped like an upside down heart. Deer tracks are easy to find and identify.

Wild turkeys live in grassy areas. They have black and brown feathers. They have big fanlike tails. Turkeys eat seeds, nuts, leaves, and fruit. They can fly short distances, and they can run fast. Turkey tracks are about the same size as a child's hand. Each foot has three long toes.

Rabbits are another common animal. They have gray, black, or brown fur. Rabbits eat plants from people's gardens, grasses, and clover. Foxes, snakes, and coyotes eat rabbits. Rabbits live in grassy areas that have many places to hide. They have small front feet and large back feet that are great for jumping. Look for two long ovals near two short ovals, a clear space with no tracks, and another group of four tracks.

Coyotes have brown, black, and gray fur. These colors help them blend into the darkness—the time they are most active. Coyotes make howling and yipping noises at night. They are not afraid to live and hunt near people. Coyotes eat mice, rabbits, and birds. Coyotes are the size of large dogs. Their tracks resemble dog tracks—four circular toes above a triangle.

Mice are small and swift. They have brown, black, or gray fur and long, hairless tails. They live in fields, woods, barns, and sometimes in houses. Many animals eat mice, so mice hide during the day and look for food at night. They eat seeds, insects, and berries. Mice have four toes on their forefeet and five toes on their hind feet. Their tracks are less than one inch long.

Quails are small, brown and white birds that live in grassy areas. Their coloring allows them to hide well in grass. Quails scratch in the dirt to find insects, seeds, and berries. They live in groups called coveys. Quails sleep in a circle with their tails pointed inward. This arrangement keeps them warm, and they can spot anything coming to harm them. Quail tracks have three long toes pointing forward and one short toe pointing back.

Black bears live in wooded areas near water. They eat plants, insects, and fish. Black bears sometimes sleep during the winter. They are strong and quick; they can run fast; and they

are good tree climbers. It is very rare to see bears or their tracks in Nebraska. Black bear tracks are large—up to seven inches long and five inches wide. Each foot has five toes with claws.

Animal tracks are most easily observed in wet sand, mud, or snow. Trackers are people who study animal tracks. A good way to learn tracking is to make a drawing of any tracks you discover. Then use an animal tracks book or website to identify the animals.

Grade 3 Narrative

Lisa and the Pigpen

Peter lived in a small farming town with his mama, papa, brothers, and sisters. Everyone had chores. Peter's job was to look after his youngest sister Lisa. Lisa was three years old and very curious. She liked to wander out of the house and play outside.

One day Peter and Lisa were playing hide-and-seek in the house, and the game turned into a chase.

Crash! Bang! Peter tripped and landed in the clothes basket on the kitchen floor.

Lisa fell on the floor beside him and laughed. "Do it again," begged Lisa.

"Oh, no," said Mama. "You two go outside with your chasing and stay out of my way. Don't get into trouble."

The children scampered out the door into the sunshine. At that moment, Dr. Brown was leading a pig down the road. Dr. Brown was the town's veterinarian. He had been taking care of Ms. Smith's pig since it was born. The piglet had been small and weak. Now he was going to her house to show her how big and healthy the pig had grown. Lisa laughed and ran to catch up to Dr. Brown and the pig. Peter yelled after her.

"Where are you going?" Lisa asked Dr. Brown.

Dr. Brown turned around and saw the little girl following him. "I am going to show my friend, Ms. Smith, how big her pig has grown."

"I'm going, too," said Lisa. She marched right along with Dr. Brown.

"Okay, then I'm going, too," Peter sighed, and followed behind them.

When they arrived at Ms. Smith's house, Dr. Brown put the pig in the pigpen at the back of the house. Lisa followed Dr. Brown and the pig. When she saw the other pigs, she squealed with delight. The pigs squealed and oinked.

"Don't go in the pigpen, children," Dr. Brown said, "I don't want you to get dirty." Then he went in the house to visit Ms. Smith.

Lisa wanted to play with the pigs. She started across the pen to pet the pigs. On her way, she slipped in the mud and fell in a puddle. Lisa was wet from her head to her toes with black, dirty pigpen water. She splashed with her hands and kicked her feet, spreading mud all over her clothes. "I'm a pig! I'm a pig!" she said laughing.

“Come out of there right now, Lisa!” screamed Peter.

At that moment, Dr. Brown and Ms. Smith came rushing outside. They heard the children shouting and the pigs squealing.

“Someone is in the pigpen with the pigs!” Ms. Smith exclaimed.

They went to the back of the house and found Lisa splashing in the water.

Peter was shouting at Lisa. “Lisa! Look at you! What will Mama say? You get out of there now!”

“I’m a pig!” said Lisa. She refused to come out of the pigpen.

Peter crawled through the fence to get a hold of Lisa. Lisa ran from him. Peter slipped and fell in the black, dirty pigpen puddle.

“Oh, no! Now we’re both wet and dirty and smell like a pigpen!” Peter said.

Peter struggled through the mud, and finally reached Lisa. He took Lisa’s arm and pulled her out of the pigpen. As they walked home, Peter tightly held Lisa’s hand. He wasn’t going to let her run away again! Peter’s face was long and sad. He wondered what Mama would say when she saw how dirty they were. When they walked in the house, Mama looked up from her laundry. Her eyes grew large and her mouth opened wide. Then she laughed.

“You look and smell like two little pigs. Take off your dirty clothes. I have just enough water to wash the two of you. Your clothes are another matter. I will take care of those later.”

When the children were clean, Mama put Lisa in her bed for a nap. Peter went outside to sit and think. How was he going to keep Lisa out of trouble? His chore of looking after his little sister was going to be difficult.