

# CSI: Backyard

Students will use their detective skills to observe and record animal tracks outside.

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## Materials:

- Paper and clipboard or notebook and pencil
- Pages 2-3 of MN DNR [Animal Tracks Handout](#) or [Common Animal Tracks Handout](#)

## Instructions:

1. Before class, stage the 'theft' of something in your classroom that students would notice. Enlist the help of another adult to keep the item until they can return it back into the classroom after you are outside.
2. Play along with the scenario, 'Oh, no! There's been a terrible crime! Some critter outside has stolen [item]. The class needs to find out who did it!'
3. As a class, start thinking about who our possible suspects are. What kinds of animals have you seen in this area? What kinds of animals do you think are here but we haven't seen? Use the handout to determine which are in your area.
4. Explain you are going outside to look for what animals have been active in the area by looking for their tracks (the 'evidence'). Discuss what kind of evidence might you may find and where you should look for evidence.
5. Students should bring something outside to sketch the tracks they find with, along with a copy of the track handout. As students find tracks, they should sketch them and try to match them on the handout. If nothing matches, encourage them to make an educated guess with reasons why they think a track was made by that animal.
6. Head outside with your class to search for evidence. Scouting locations beforehand will be helpful to know where tracks are. Either lead a walk or have students explore one spot—whatever works best for your classroom and your outdoor spot.
7. Give students ample time to find, sketch, and try to identify tracks. Depending on weather, aim for 15-20 minutes.
8. Return inside and discuss what tracks they found and who their main suspect is. Encourage them to base their guesses on the evidence they found.
9. Arrange for the return of the stolen item to complete the mystery!