



Revised 4/17/20  
Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge

# The Secrets of Watching Wildlife

**4th Grade**

**60 Minutes**

**Fall**

## Summary

A field leader reads excerpts and summarizes Jim Arnosky's book, *The Secrets of Watching Wildlife*. Students discuss Arnosky's observations, notes, and the secret tips he discloses for finding wildlife. While inside, the field leader has students practice some of Arnosky's tips. Students spread out in the room and the field guide coaches them on going alone, taking a wide range of vision, sitting downwind, blending into their environment, and being still. Once the students demonstrate they understand these skills, the field guide takes them outside. Students bring their nature journals and head into the prairie to practice "the secrets of watching wildlife". Students record their thoughts, emotions, and observations in their nature journal. Once finished, they come inside and are encouraged to share their discoveries. They reflect on which "secrets" were hardest or easiest for them to do and which ones worked best for them.

## Next Generation Science and Iowa Core Standards

### Next Generation Science

- 4-LS1-2
  - Use a model to describe that animals receive different types of information through their senses, process the information in their brain, and respond to the information in different ways.

### Literacy

### Writing

- W.4.1



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- Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

## Speaking and Listening

- **SL.4.1**
  - Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.4.3**
  - Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

## Materials and Resources

- White board
- Dry erase marker
- Blank paper or nature journals
- Pencils
- Colored pencils
- Clip boards
- *Secrets of a Wildlife Watcher* by Jim Arnosky

## Directions

1. In the classroom, welcome students, teachers, and chaperones to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Remind them of your name.
2. Ask students if they have ever had an experience watching wildlife. What did they watch? What made the experience easy or hard? Today we are going to make a wildlife watching guide. First, what does the term "wildlife" mean? Once the class has a definition, write it on the board.
3. A good way to start our guide is to learn from experts. Tell students about a naturalist named Jim Arnosky. He is one of the best wildlife watchers in the



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world. He is also a self-taught author, artist, musician and naturalist. He grew up in Pennsylvania and lived with his wife Deanna and their two daughters in an old farmhouse for over 30 years. He raised sheep for 17 years of those 30 years. Show students a picture of Jim Arnosky and some of his drawings from the book, *The Secrets of a Wildlife Watcher*. Be sure to highlight how much detail he shows in his drawings and remind students that their journals could look just as great!

4. Explain to students that Arnosky gives 3 main secrets for watching wildlife. Tell them that you are going to give them the secrets and afterwards everyone is going to go outside and see how well they work. The 3 secrets are:
  - a. **Finding**- What should we look for when trying to find an animal? look for tracks, homes such as holes or trees or power lines, scat, left-over food such as stripped pinecones from a squirrel or matted grass from a deer bed. Explain that animals have a home range- most animals do not travel very far from their homes.
  - b. **Stalking**- How can we avoid being noticed? stay downwind to avoid giving off your scent, get down close to the ground to camouflage yourself, use your senses, and be as quiet as possible.
  - c. **Watching**- go alone, take a wide-range of vision, be still, record your observations.
5. Have students practice doing these three steps first inside. Provide a mock scenario for the students to pretend like they are finding, stalking and watching wildlife. Instruct the students that you are an animal, and they must follow you through the visitor center and get as close as possible without noticing. Tell students they must freeze if you turn around and look at them; if you catch them being too loud or moving, they are “out.” Have a chaperone time 30 seconds, then go somewhere in the visitor center.
6. Once students have finished practicing, set up their nature journals using the example on the following page. Instruct students to record the date, time, temperature, weather, and title their nature journal entry “Watching Wildlife.” Provide them with the sentence starters and explain to students that after



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observing wildlife, they should record their thoughts, emotions, and observations about the wildlife they are watching. They should leave the last sentence for when they return inside. Remind students that wildlife can be anything from a deer or bison, to a vulture or sparrow, or even to a small insect or spider. Their job is to record what they see, hear, feel, and smell in their nature journal.

7. When students appear ready, have them line up at the door. Remind them they are expected to behave as naturalists. Naturalists are calm, quiet, inquisitive, observant, prepared, responsible, and happy outside.
8. Once outside, have them search for signs of animals. Walk to the top of the overlook trail. Explain to students that they are going to go with a partner on a search for wildlife. Remind them of the secrets that Arnosky gave them on how to find, stalk, and watch wildlife. Give students definitive boundaries. Explain that they should come back to the sidewalk when they receive a certain signal (this can be whatever the teacher desires).
9. Let students go into the prairie in search of wildlife. Make sure students are following the instructions. Model behavior for them by going out to look for wildlife too. Make sure adult leaders are also observing and journaling.
10. After about 15 minutes, signal students back to the sidewalk. Have them sit down on the sidewalk and ask for naturalists to share their discoveries. Lastly, have students complete the sentence, "My top three tips for watching wildlife at Neal Smith are...". After sharing, head back inside.
11. Once inside, remind students that they do not have to be at the Refuge to watch wildlife. They can do what they did today in their backyard, at a park, at their school- anywhere outdoors!



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## Resources

### Journal Prompt

Location, Date, Time, Temperature, Weather  
Watching Wildlife

I saw....

-2 brown ants carrying a seed



-1 brown bird sitting in a nest



When I watched wildlife, I was...

-being very still

-crouching in the grass

-not making a sound

My top three tips for watching wildlife at Neal Smith are:

*listen and be very quiet.*

*Hide in the grass.*

*Look for signs of the animal first.*