

## Instinctive Animals

**Objective:** Students will be able to recognize the difference between instinct and learned behavior in animals.

**Concept:** Just like humans, animals exhibit both instinct and learned behavior. By recognizing the differences between instincts and behaviors, a person can help alter an animal's behavior that can be changed and stay away from instinctual behaviors that cannot be changed and lead to dangers.

**Targeted Age:** Elementary

**Materials:** Paper and pencils

Divide the students into small groups of four or five students. Assign a different animal to each group (horse, cow, ostrich, skunk, etc.). Instruct the students to act like the animals they are assigned. Encourage one student in each group to make noise, walk, eat, play, pass time, etc. like the animal their group is assigned. Have the rest of the group write down what they observe (panting, walking stiff legged, paws ground, tears flesh, jumps, etc.)

**Q: Which of the exhibited behaviors would be considered an instinct?**

**A:** A protective action, such as mothers protecting babies or bulls snorting to protect their territory, is an instinctual trait.

**Q: Which of the exhibited behaviors could be considered a learned behavior?**

**A:** When an animal comes to you when they are called or learns to stay away from electric fences.

**Q: How does knowing the difference between an instinct and a learned behavior influence your safety around animals?**

**A:** A learned behavior can be changed. However, it is more difficult to change a learned behavior than train the animal correctly in the first place. Instincts, such as protecting a baby animal, can lead to attacks on people if the animal feels threatened. By recognizing that the behavior is instinctual instead of learned, you can be more cautious.

