

Can it Be Real? Eastern Amphibian and Reptiles

Original Activity: <https://www.plt.org/activity-resources/prek-8-activity-11-can-it-be-real/>

This activity is a wonderful way to introduce biodiversity and adaptations of local organisms while also getting students to use their reading and analyzing skills. Use the selected cards or create your own.

Directions:

1. Print out one set of cards for each group.
2. Break participants into groups of 4-5.
3. Give each group a set of cards and tell them to read the descriptions. While listening, have the group decide if the salamander described on the card is real or not. Have participants list reasons why they believe the organism is or is not real.
4. After all groups have made their decisions, read the descriptions as a class and tally each group's vote for each organism.
5. After all animals have been voted on, reveal to the students that all of the organisms ARE REAL and, in fact, live in the eastern United States. See if participants can name the actual organisms.
6. Show pictures of the organisms and provide additional background information on each.

Extensions:

1. Have students research other local amphibian and reptile species and write their own 'Can it Be Real' prompts.

Student Cards

Species 1:

I can reach lengths over 2 feet long and can weigh up to 4 pounds. I have lungs, but I breathe through pores in my skin. Because of this, the Latin name for my genus means “secret gill.” Even though I am a salamander, I can’t regrow my limbs. The males of my species find a nest site and guard the eggs. I have sharp teeth and an amazing sense of smell. I can live around 30 years, but some of my kind have been found to survive well past 50 years! I go by many names, some of which include lasagna lizard and snot otter.

Species 2:

I am described as rugged and muscular. I have a hard, protective shell with pointy ridges on the back. My kind has existed for around 90 million years. I will eat almost anything that I can from aquatic vegetation to other animals to dead stuff (carrion). I can live well over 30 years in the wild and can weigh up to 75 pounds. While I spend most of my time in the water, I can travel a long distance on land to lay my eggs.

Species 3:

I have a superpower: I can freeze! In fact, in some areas like Alaska, I can freeze up to 7 months out of the year. I mate early in the year and make noises that almost sound like ducks quacking/chuckling. I can lay 1,000 to 3,000 eggs at a time which I attach to grass or twigs in water. To prevent small mammals like shrews from eating me, I sometimes release toxic skin secretions as an adult.

Species 4:

I spend much of my time underground, but I am also solar powered! Not only do my eggs have a symbiotic relationship with algae, but recently, scientists have discovered adults can also host algae inside them. How cool?! If a predator tries to attack me, I will secrete a toxic, milky substance from my neck and back. I can live up to 32 years and migrate each spring from my underground burrow to temporary wetlands to breed. Sometimes, I migrate with hundreds of my closest pals!

Answers:

Species 1: Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis*)

Species 2: Snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)

Species 3: Wood Frog (*Lithobates sylvaticus*)

Species 4: Spotted Salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*)

Hellbender by Brian Gratwicke CC by 2.0



Snapping Turtle by Sam Stukel/ USFWS



Wood Frog by Brian Gratwicke CC by 2.0



Spotted Salamander by Brian Gratwicke CC by 2.0

