

Survivor!



Objectives

Students investigate how a cheetah cub's behavior is important for its survival.

Background

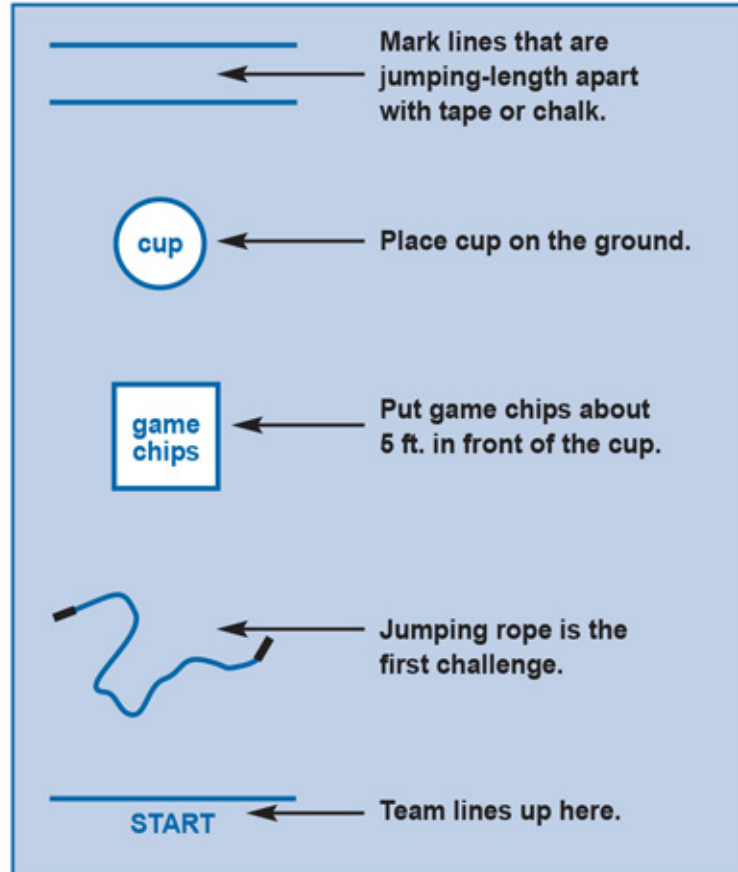
The first years of an animal's life are often the most difficult. For cheetah cubs, predators and prey availability play significant roles in survival.

Materials

- large outdoor play area
- per student group:**
- one jump rope
- plastic game chips (at least one per student)
- drinking cup
- chalk or masking tape
- eight index cards (optional, for grades 2–4)

Action

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: Set up two identical obstacle courses on the playground as indicated here.



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IN CLASS

1. Ask students what they think a cheetah cub's life is like and what behaviors it does. Explain that many cheetahs don't survive the first few years of life. As young cubs they succumb to predators and when they leave their mother's protection, successful hunting becomes a challenge.
2. Divide students into two teams. Explain that the teams will compete in an obstacle course relay that symbolizes the dangers of a cheetah cub's first year of life. Each student will have a turn to complete the obstacle course.
3. Demonstrate the behaviors that students have to do to successfully get through the obstacle course. These represent cheetah behaviors:

Jumping rope represents avoiding predators. A student must jump rope four times without mistake to successfully avoid a predator. (If a student messes up, he or she is symbolically "eaten" and is out of the game.)

Dropping a game chip into the drinking cup represents finding and eating prey. A student must place a game chip between his or her knees, carefully "walk" to the cup, and drop the chip into the cup. (If a student drops his or her chip before reaching the cup or misses the cup, he or she symbolically "starves" and is out of the game.)

Jumping over the chalk marks or tape represents locating a safe place to rest. (If a student isn't able to clear the mark, they symbolically "die" and they are out of the game.)

4. Begin play with teams lined up behind the starting line of each playing lane. At your signal, the first team member in each group completes the obstacle course, then returns and tags the next person in line. A waiting team member begins the obstacle course when tagged. If a student is out of the game, they immediately return and tag the next team member. The team with the most survivors at the end of the game is the winning team.
5. Repeat the simulation several times to give everyone a chance to complete the entire obstacle course.
6. *Optional, for grades 2–4:* Add an element of chance to the game. Give each team a set of "Survivor Chance Index Cards." Each team member draws an index card before starting the obstacle course. (Make the "Survivor Chance Index Cards" ahead of time):

You are living in an area with lots of competition for food sources from other predators. Do all of the challenges twice.

You become a snack for a lion. You are out.

A leopard is chasing you! Keep an eye out for it—walk backward through each challenge.

Conservation efforts in your area are highly effective. Go directly to the haul-out (jump) challenge.

You have large herds of springbok to hunt. Skip the food (game chip) challenge.

Large sections of your range are being used by humans to raise livestock. Hop on one foot through all the challenges.

Community outreach programs and educational programs are raising awareness and changing attitudes and helping to establish practices among rural communities about coexisting with cheetahs. Skip a turn and take a rest.

Your camouflage works too well for a predator to see you. Go directly to the food (game chip) challenge.