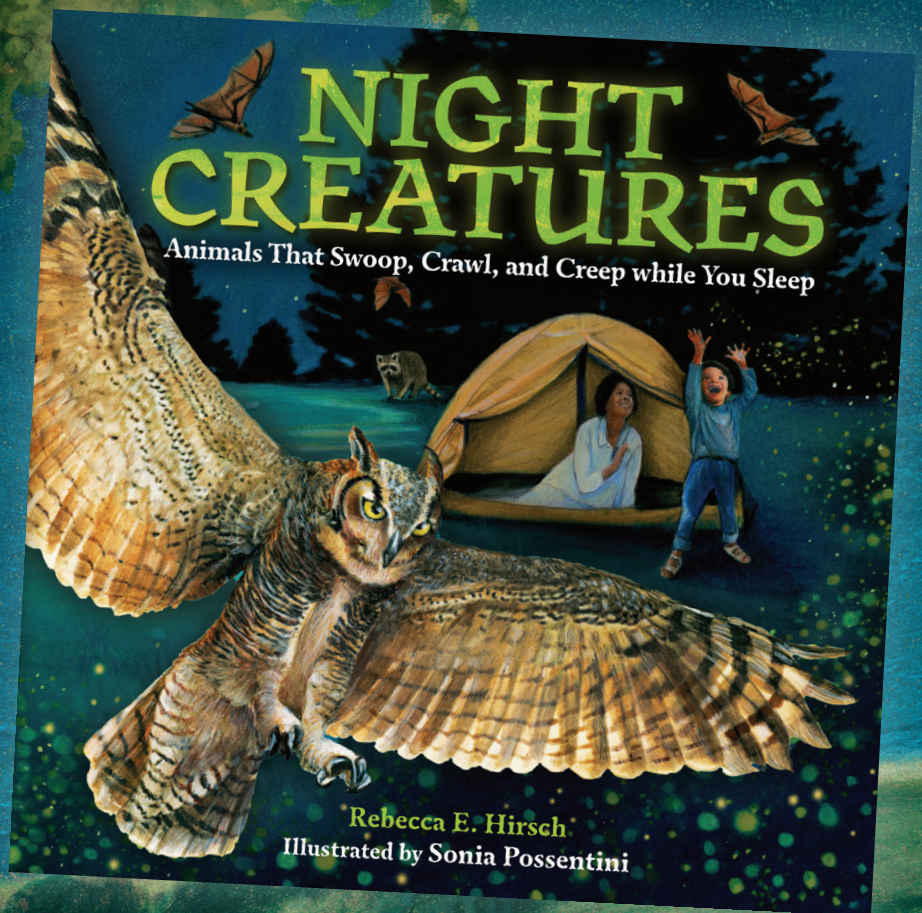


NIGHT CREATURES

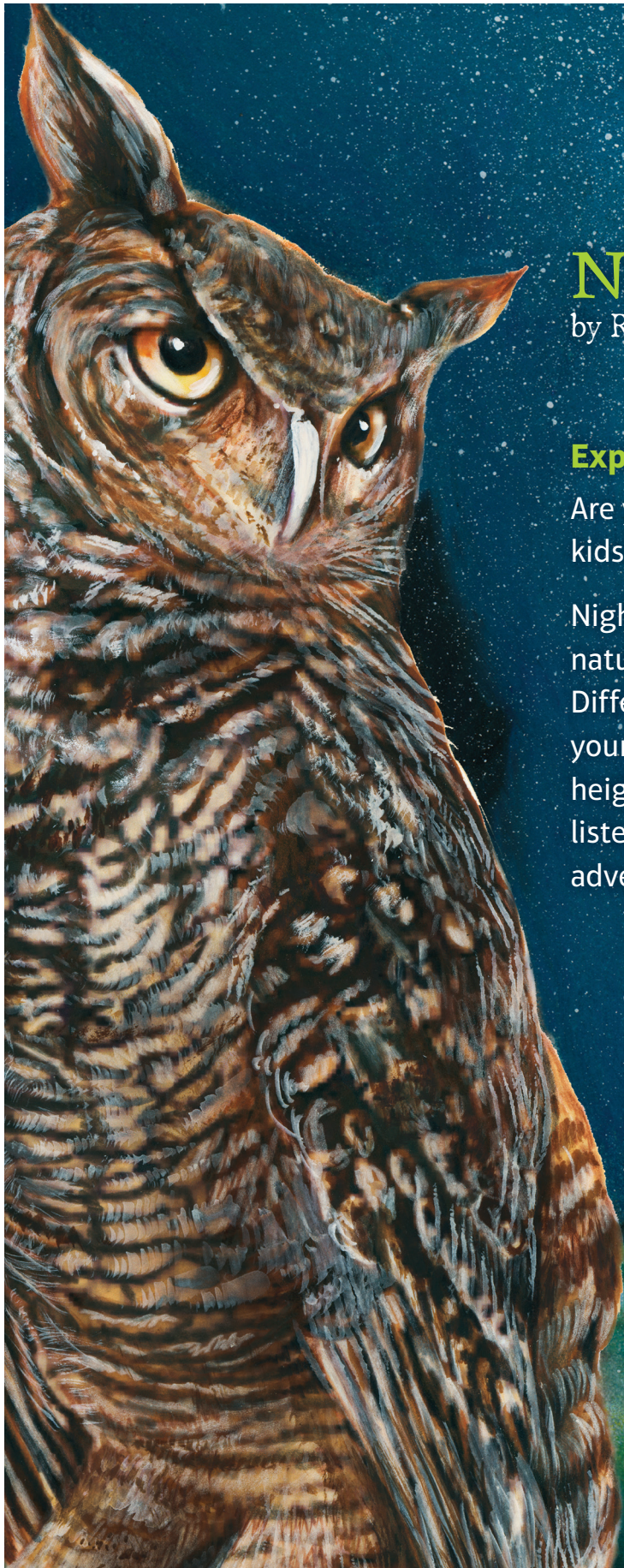
Animals That Swoop, Crawl,
and Creep while You Sleep

978-1-5415-8129-6
Rebecca E. Hirsch



This guide was created by Rebecca E. Hirsch.
© 2021 Lerner Publishing Group
Illustrations © 2021 by Sonia Possentini. All rights reserved. This page may be
reproduced for free distribution for educational purposes.

Lerner 



NIGHT CREATURES

by Rebecca E. Hirsch

Explore the Night

Are you looking for a memorable activity to do with kids? Try exploring the outdoor world at night.

Nighttime gives you a new perspective on the natural world. Different animals are awake. Different smells and sounds are present. Because your vision is limited, your other senses will be heightened. Night forces you to slow down and listen. Exploring the night can be a wonderful adventure, filled with excitement and discovery.

Plan a Night Hike

A fun way to get to know the night is with a night hike. A night hike requires a little planning to be done safely. Choose a safe place to explore that's as dark as possible. Try a natural area, park, or secluded backyard away from a large city and out of the direct lights of buildings and street lamps. Walk through the area during the day to get to know it better and select a safe route. Look out for potential hazards on your route.

Bring a flashlight, but try to avoid using it except in case of an emergency or to read a map. Cover the lit end of the flashlight with red cellophane or a red sock so the light comes out red in color. Red light won't ruin your eyes' adjustment to the dark, and many night creatures do not see red light and so they will not be disturbed by it.

Be sure to dress warmly for your nighttime adventure. Night air can be chilly, even in summer. You can even pack some hot chocolate to enjoy after your adventure.

MATERIALS:

- Flashlight covered with red cellophane or a red sock
- Worry stones (smooth pebbles)

OPTIONAL MATERIALS:

- Rope
- Scent canisters (small container with pine cones or mint leaves)
- Magic sniffing potion (bottle of water)
- A bag of textured material such as pine cones, shells, pebbles, pine needles, feathers, etc.
- Small pieces of scrap paper
- A bag of unwrapped crayons
- Hot chocolate



Afraid of the Dark?

If a child is afraid, talk ahead of time about their fears before exploring the dark. What makes night different than day? Why does the dark feel scary? Most people aren't really afraid of the dark. They're afraid of what they can't see that they imagine might be hidden in the dark.

One way to soothe an anxious child is to bring along a smooth pebble, called a worry stone. If a child is worried about the dark, place the pebble in their hand. Explain that they can put the pebble in their pocket and when they rub it, their worries will go into the stone. Assure them that stones are tough and can take it.

You can make nervous night hikers feel safer by leading them single file while holding onto a rope with everyone spaced a few feet apart.

Alternatively, you can experience the wonders of the night and do the activities while sitting in one place or lying on a blanket.

Enter the Dark Gradually

Your eyes will wake up at night, but you need to give them a little time. Give your eyes at least 10 minutes, and preferably 20 minutes, to adjust to the dark. Try sitting or standing in one place while your eyes adjust. Encourage everyone to be quiet and listen for night sounds so as not to scare away any animals. If you need to talk, speak quietly, using your "night voice." This can be a good time to try one of the activities, like Deer Ears or What Is It?

Once your eyes adjust to the dark, you may be surprised at how much light you can see. Light may be coming from the stars and moon, especially if there is a full moon. Light may be coming from glowing animals, like fireflies. In a forest, light may even come from glowing mushrooms!



Time for a Night Hike

When it's time for your night hike, walk as silently as possible so you can hear the sounds of night. Keep all your senses open and alert.

As you walk, feel the ground with your feet. Even if you can't see where you are going, your feet will be able to feel the difference between the compacted ground of a hard path and the softer, squishier ground just off the path. If you encounter an obstacle, like a tree root or a bend in the trail, tell the next person behind you and ask them to pass it along. That way no one will be surprised by what is coming.

As you walk, smell the air. Does it smell different than in the daytime?

Look at tree silhouettes against the night sky. Can you identify trees based on their shape alone?

You may feel temperature changes. Are some areas cooler? Why do you think that is?

Watch for evidence of night creatures (see Signs of Night Creatures). Listen for their calls. Depending on the time of year, you may hear the breathy snort of a deer, the hoot of an owl, the bellows or chirps of frogs, or the calls of crickets and katydids.

It's a good idea to pause along your route. Practice being still, quiet, and alert. Animals may no longer realize you are there and begin to act normally. There is no telling what may suddenly appear!

A pause along the route is a good chance to try one or more of the games and activities on the next page.

Games and Activities

What Is it?

For this game, you'll need to bring along a bag of textured objects, such as feathers (even a bit of down from a down jacket can work), a pebble, pine needles, a pine cone, a shell, etc. Ask a child to hold the item in their open hand with their eyes closed. Can they identify the object by touch alone?

What Color Is It?

Can your eyes see color at night? To find out, give everyone a piece of white scrap paper and an unwrapped crayon. Ask them to draw a night creature on one side of the paper. On the other side, have them write what color crayon they think they have. Return the crayons to the bag. Have everyone put their drawing in their pocket.

At the end of the walk, when everyone is back in the light, each person can see if the color they wrote matches the color of the drawing. Don't be surprised if it doesn't. Even though we can see at night, we are "color blind." This is because our eyes have two types of light receptors, rods and cones. Cones see color, but they need a lot of light to work. At night, we rely on our rods to see, but they do not sense color.

Deer Ears

Deer have large ears that catch and funnel sound. A deer can swivel its ears to hear sounds coming from different directions.

You can make your own deer ears by cupping both hands behind your ears. This funnels sounds to your ears, just like a deer's ears. Try on your deer ears, then drop your hands and compare. You'll hear sounds much better with your deer ears.

With your deer ears on, be quiet, rotate in a circle, and listen. You should be able to hear things you didn't before. Try aiming your deer ears in different directions. Can you use them to pinpoint where sounds are coming from?

Magic Sniffing Potion

Many animals have a strong sense of smell. Animals such as deer and dogs have wet noses that hold onto scent molecules, making them excellent odor detectors.

Pass around a small container filled with a scented object (garlic, pine needles, mint leaves, etc.). Have everyone smell the object. Next, have each person wet their nose using a few drops from a water bottle squirted onto their fingers. Again, pass around the scented object. Can they smell it better with a dry nose or a wet nose?



Signs of Night Creatures

Many animals are nocturnal (active only at night) or crepuscular (active only at dusk or dawn). You can learn to identify these creatures even if you can't see them clearly.

IF YOU SEE...	IT'S PROBABLY...	WHAT TO DO
Flashes of light	Fireflies	If the night isn't completely dark, you may be able to catch a firefly in your cupped hands. Then open your hands. The beetle may crawl on your palm and give a flash before flying away.
Gleaming spots of light in pairs	The eyes of a night creature, such as a raccoon or bobcat, reflecting off the moon or your flashlight	Shine your red-covered flashlight to try to see whose eyes they are.
Flash of a white tail	A cottontail (low to the ground) or deer (higher off the ground)	Stay still and watch closely.
Darting, zigzag movements in the air	A bat	Stay still and watch.
Darting movements through grass	A mouse or other small creature	Sit still and watch to see if you can identify the creature.
Quiet gliding wings attached to a feathery body	An owl	Stay still and watch.
Black-and-white streaks or spots moving close to the ground	A skunk	Stay still and watch, getting no closer than about fifteen feet (4.5 meters).

Night Reflections

After your nighttime adventure, you can sit in a comfortable spot outdoors, either in the dark or around a campfire. Invite children to talk about what they experienced. Children can complete prompts like:

The night makes me feel...

I felt scared when...

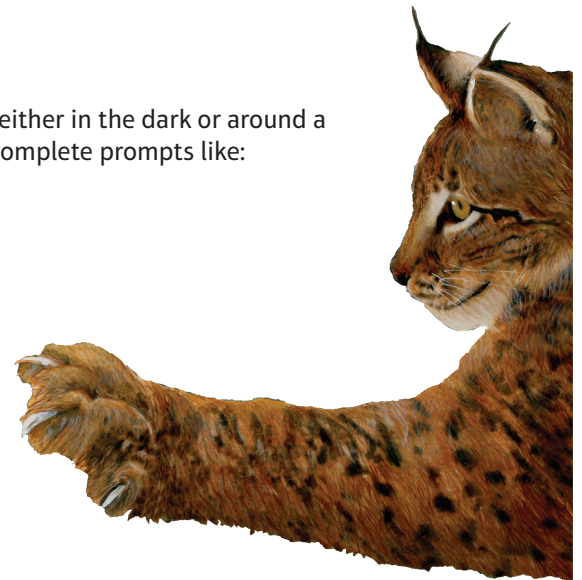
The night looks like...

The night sounds like...

The night smells like...

The night feels like...

My favorite night creature is... because...



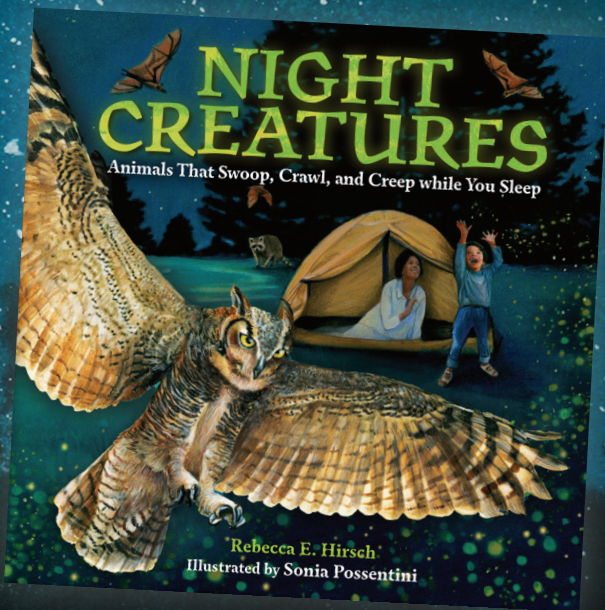
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Doug Wentzel, Program Director at Shaver's Creek Environmental Center in Petersburg, Pennsylvania, for sharing his valuable insights on night walks with me. Other sources I consulted include:

Bosak, Susan. *Science Is... 2nd Edition*. Ontario: Scholastic Canada, 1991.

Brown, Vinson. *Knowing the Outdoors in the Dark*. New York: Collier Books, 1972.

"Night Hike." Upham Woods Outdoor Learning Center, University of Wisconsin-Extension. <https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/uphamwoods/files/2019/05/Night-Hike-Lesson-Plan.pdf>



NIGHT CREATURES

Animals That Swoop, Crawl,
and Creep while You Sleep

Hardcover: 978-1-5415-8129-6
\$19.99 (List) • \$14.99 (S&L)

eBook: 978-1-7284-3092-8

Grades K-4 • Ages 5-10



REBECCA E. HIRSCH is the author of more than eighty children's science and nature books, including *Plants Can't Sit Still*, an NCTE Notable Children's Book in the Language Arts. Her love of night creatures can be traced back to her childhood in the western Pennsylvania countryside, where she spent summer nights chasing fireflies, watching the stars come out, and listening to frogs sing. She holds a doctorate in the life sciences and makes her home in central Pennsylvania. Find out more at rebeccahirsch.com.