

# Cougar and Deer

Students learn about the importance of stealth and good listening skills in this enjoyable outdoor activity. A veritable horde of cougars try to stalk and “kill” a blindfolded deer, whose weapon is a formidable one: their sense of hearing, augmented by their “deer ears”. Will all the cougar starve before they reach the deer? It depends on how sure-footed they are...

(adapted from an activity in *Rediscovery*, by Thom Henley)

## Materials:

- a blindfold
- a long strip of flagging tape
- natural area

## Instructions for the Teacher:

1. Take your students to an outdoor area, where there is a certain amount of naturally-occurring litter (grass, leaves, etc.,) on the ground. A forested area is best but is not essential.
2. Tell students about one of the adaptations of a deer - specifically , tell them about deer ears, which are shaped to pick up the slightest noise from the surrounding area. Have students cup their hands in front of them, so that if you were to pour water into their hands they would be able to hold some - and then have them put their cupped hands behind their ears to listen to naturally occurring noises. Deer ears work wonderfully well with lower frequency noises such as running water, wind in the treetops, or even traffic on a road!



3. Choose a student who will play the part of the cougar. Ask him/her to tuck the flagging tape into their pocket or waistband so that it dangles nearly to the ground.
4. Tell all the remaining students that they will act as cougars in this activity, and that all they have to do to kill the deer is to get close enough to the deer to snatch the flagging tape away from them, in the same manner as a player stops another in the game of flag football. But the deer has a defence: if the deer hears the cougar, it can kill it by simply pointing directly at the cougar and yelling "Starve!" A correct hit means that the cougar dies of starvation (as might perhaps happen to a young and clumsy cougar); the student involved simply sits down and remains silent throughout the remainder of the activity.

Your role is to act as referee: when the deer shouts "Starve!" it is up to you to say "Freeze" to halt cougars in their stalking, judge if the deer is pointing in the right direction, tell the cougar either to sit down or to keep playing, and say "Game on" so cougars can resume their stalk.

5. Have all cougars start their stalking of the deer at least 10 metres away from the blindfolded deer. Encourage the deer to use their deer ears to better listen to the rustling of leaves under careless feet! If a cougar manages to kill the deer, let that cougar become the deer for the next round.

Tips for a more effective game:

- once students have played this game so they understand the rules, divide them into two groups, and have another adult (or a responsible student) be the referee for that group.
- Give the deer a limited number of "Starves" - if you have 15 stalking cougar, try giving the deer only twenty chances to say 'starve'.
- Please note that cougars do not actually hunt in packs like this! But they do rely on a quiet stalk in order to catch their prey, and occasionally a young and inexperienced animal may starve to death because of their lack of stalking skill.