

Animal patterns

This poster features the distinctive skin patterns of six animals that might be seen on safari: an elephant, tiger, giraffe, leopard, snake and zebra. Help children identify them and use them for a variety of activities

Activities to support the Early Years Foundation Stage

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Attach the cards to the lids of six boxes. Put a matching soft toy or model animal into each box and invite children to guess which animal is inside.
- Invite children to examine the cards closely. Ask if they would like their skin to be patterned, furry, rough or tough? What do they like about their own skin?

Communication, Language and Literacy

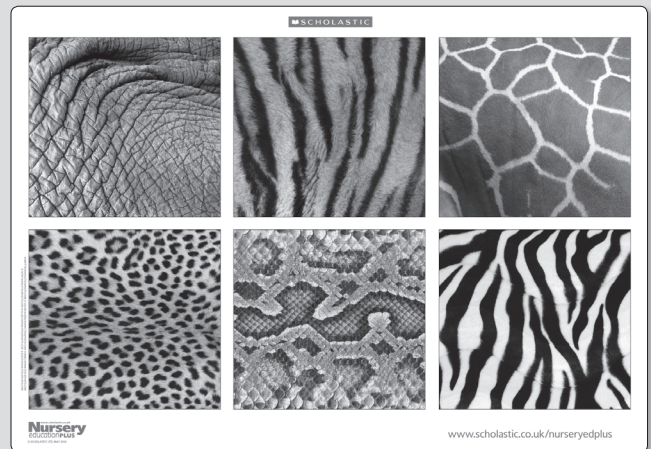
- Create simple word cards to describe the skins and patterns on the cards, for example, 'soft', 'fur', 'spot', 'bumpy'. Challenge more able readers with words such as 'rough', 'tough', 'wrinkled'. Spread the poster cards on the carpet and encourage children to read the word cards and arrange them next to the relevant image.
- Invite children to think of a word starting with 's' to describe each poster image, for example, 'stone', 'stripes', 'soft', 'spotty', 'scales'. Make up sentences together using these words, for example, 'An elephant's skin looks like a stone'.

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy

- Ask children to match the tiger, elephant and zebra pattern cards to the images of the same animals on the 'On safari' poster. Discuss similarities and differences, for example, the tiger and zebra have stripes but different colours and textures. The elephant has an irregular skin that is rough and 'cracked'.
- Hide the pattern cards around the room where they are easy to find, such as on top, in front or beside things. Invite six children to find a card each and describe exactly where they found it. Talk about how easy it was to find the cards in this environment compared to spotting camouflaged animals in the wild.

Knowledge and Understanding of the World

- Look closely at the different patterns on the poster and talk about ways in which they are similar and ways in which they are different.
- Explore the images and talk about how these patterns might help an animal to hide, for example, stripes will help the tiger to hide in long dry grass, spots will help the leopard to merge into its surroundings among the shadows and bright sunlight. Hide models of the animals featured in the poster in small world environments using natural materials such as straw, grass, twigs and sand.



How to use the poster

Laminate each image to create a set of pattern cards. Drape a table in animal print fabric and arrange related soft toys, models and books on top. Leave the print cards among the resources. Encourage children to make comparisons between the items.

Alternatively, leave the cards in numeracy, mark-making and creative areas to inspire pattern-making and creativity.

Physical Development

- Hang the poster cards around the room and ask children to sit in the middle of the floor. Explain that you want them to find their families, represented by the cards. Give verbal clues to two children at a time, for example, 'We are tall with long necks'. The pair can then move like giraffes to the relevant card. Continue until all children are safely 'home'. Invite each group to move around with their 'family' and pretend to be on safari, walking amongst them taking photographs.
- Examine the poster cards and use a range of tools to make patterns and imprints in dough to match the card.

Creative Development

- Display the poster cards in the creative area and invite children to try and recreate the patterns in three dimensions on sheets of A4 card, for example, creating elephant hide by spreading a mixture of grey paint, paste and sand over the card and marking it with a clay tool, or using wax resist methods to draw the pattern of a giraffe's coat with a candle and then washing it with watery brown paint.
- Use wax crayons to create the same patterns in two dimensions. Discuss which method is more effective, 2D or 3D.

Jean Evans is an early years consultant and author.