



Session 4.2: Gopher Tortoise Level 6-8

In this activity, your child will be researching Gopher Tortoises and their relationship to the ecosystem. After receiving some introductory facts, they will complete a search for more information and have the opportunity to complete a craft related to the Gopher Tortoise.

Suggested Materials

- Technology for completing research on Gopher Tortoises
- Shoe box or other box for creating a diorama of a Gopher Tortoise habitat
- Materials for crafts - this could be as simple as markers, crayons, magazine clippings, construction paper, etc. You can also add in more materials like play dough, strings, tape/glue, cardboard, etc. if you have them available to you

Activity

Have your child read the following paragraph:

Gopher Tortoises are native to the Florida ecosystem and are considered **keystone species**. The reason they are considered this is because they share their burrow with over 300 species at any given time! This is called **commensal living**. Many species of animals rely on the gopher tortoise's burrow for survival and raising their young. Without this safe space, many species would not have somewhere to live and might have trouble surviving. Today, we will be completing a research study on the importance of gopher tortoises to their ecosystems.

Part 1: Next, have your child complete independent research to find out more about the Gopher Tortoises. Specifically, have them focus on the relationship between the gopher tortoise and other plant and animal species in its ecosystem. Here are some guiding questions that they should focus on:

1. What types of animals share the burrow with the gopher tortoise? Are they all similar? Name at least 10 species that can be found in gopher tortoise burrows.
2. What do the gopher tortoises eat? Where can their food be found?
3. What would happen if the gopher tortoise was removed completely from their ecosystem? Think about the animals they live with and also what they eat - how will their disappearance affect these other members of their ecosystem?

Part 2: As an optional add-on to their research study, you can have your child create a shoebox diorama of a gopher tortoise burrow. They should use elements and ideas specifically from what they found out during their research to create an accurate depiction of what the burrow is like.

Additional Resources

- [GOPHER TORTOISE ACTIVITY BOOK](#)
- [How to Make a Diorama of an Ecosystem](#)
- Examples of shoebox ecosystem dioramas:



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