

FOOD CHAINS OF THE MARSH

“On Your Own” at the Virginia Aquarium



1. A *food chain* is the story of who eats whom. For example, plankton is eaten by a mullet (a fish), which is eaten by a bluefish, which is eaten by an osprey. There are many different food chains in the Owls Creek watershed. The food chains link together to form a *food web*.

- **What is always at the beginning of a food chain?**

Circle your answer:

Plants

Animals

- **Plants are called *producers*. What do plants produce?**

They produce their own _____.

- **Animals have to find food to eat and are called**

Circle your answer:

Consumers

Producers

2. During your visit, you will discover some of the food chains in the Owls Creek watershed. Put a check mark on the line when you have seen the animals listed below.

FOOD CHAIN 1:

Dead marsh grass (called detritus) gets eaten by...



_____ a **fiddler crab** (fiddler crab habitat), which gets eaten by _____ a **great blue heron** (aviary).



FOOD CHAIN 2:

Marsh grass seeds get munched on by ...



_____ a **marsh rat** (across from venomous snakes), which gets eaten by



_____ a **black rat snake** (across from venomous snakes), which gets eaten by



_____ a **great horned owl** (in aviary).

FOOD CHAIN 3:

Plant leaves are consumed by ...

_____ a **leaf hopper** (in MacroMarsh), which gets eaten by _____ a **tree frog** (across from venomous snakes).



FOOD CHAIN 4:

Plankton is sucked in by ...



_____ a **worm** (on wall in Mud Room), which gets slurped up by _____ a **spot** (in aquarium in center of water room), which gets eaten by _____ a **human**.



- From the food chains, name one animal that is a *predator*.

- What do you call the animal that a predator hunts?

3. Animals have many different adaptations for capturing and eating their food. Put a check mark on the line when you have seen the examples listed below.



_____ **Venom** – Cottonmouths, copperheads, and rattlesnakes use venom to kill their prey.



_____ **Claws** – Crabs use their claws to pick up or tear their food.



_____ **Camouflage** – A snapping turtle blends in so well to its surroundings that prey does not notice it.



_____ **Tube mouth** – Seahorses use their mouths like straws to suck in plankton from the water.

_____ **Paws** – River otters use their paws to dig up clams in the creek.

4. To discuss back at school:

- What happens to a predator if all of its prey disappears from the watershed?

- Why might all the prey disappear?

- How can people help to protect the food web in the Owls Creek watershed?

Key

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_____ a **worm** (on wall in Mud Room), which gets slurped up by _____ a **spot** (in aquarium in center of water room), which gets eaten by _____ a **human**.




- From the food chains, name one animal that is a *predator*.


heron; snake; owl; frog; spot; human


- What do you call the animal that a predator hunts?


prey


3. Animals have many different adaptations for capturing and eating their food. Put a check mark on the line when you have seen the examples listed below.

 _____ **Venom** – Cottonmouths, copperheads, and rattlesnakes use venom to kill their prey.

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4. To discuss back at school:

- What happens to a predator if all of its prey disappears from the watershed?

move somewhere else where there is food or die

- Why might all the prey disappear?

too many predators; humans overharvesting for food; killed by pollution; habitat destroyed by

humans or by storms

- How can people help to protect the food web in the watershed?