

OVERVIEW

The youngsters explore the behavior and food preferences of crawdads or crabs by “fishing” for them with various baits.



BACKGROUND

Fishing for crayfish (or “crawdaddin”) attracts a large following. People of all ages enjoy trying to catch these small, freshwater relatives of the lobster. As with other types of fishing, there seem to be almost as many different ideas on how to catch crawdads as there are fishermen.

There are over 200 different kinds of crawdads in North America. You can find crawdads in a variety of freshwater aquatic sites, from swamps to rivers. Crawdads seek cool water among rocks, snags, and other bottom objects,

including man-made debris. Crawdads are scavengers that feed on almost any kind of edible matter they encounter.

A large part of the crawdad’s popularity stems from its palatability. Boiling water and a bit of dill quickly transform a day’s catch into a delicious meal. Yet crawdads are even more fun to catch than they are to eat! Crawdads can be easily taken with inexpensive, homemade equipment. All you need are simple fishing materials, some bait, a little ingenuity, a crawdad hole, and you’re ready for *Crawdad Grab!*

CRAWDAD GRAB

BIO
KEY

Crawdads/Crab Behavior
Food Preferences
Fishing

Although this activity is written with crawdads in mind, it works equally well with crabs.

CHALLENGE: FISH FOR CRAWDADS WITH A VARIETY OF BAITS.

MATERIALS



For each team of two:

- 2 two- to four-meter pieces of heavy string* or 15-20 pound test fishing line*
- 2 large alligator clips*
- 2 one- to two-meter-long fishing poles (bamboo, fishing rod, thin dowel)
- 1 long-handled net* with a hoop opening of 20 cm or larger
- 1 crawdad container (bucket*, dishpan*, or a burlap bag)

For the group:

a variety of baits (e.g. bacon, meat or fish scraps, bones, pork rinds, liver, fish guts, clams) cut into strips or chunks
old nylon stockings or mosquito netting* for holding soft baits so that they can be securely attached to the fishing lines
weights (e.g. nails, washers) to sink the bait in moving water

For "Branching Out":

- 1 bottle of red fingernail polish*
- * Available from Delta Education.

PREPARATION

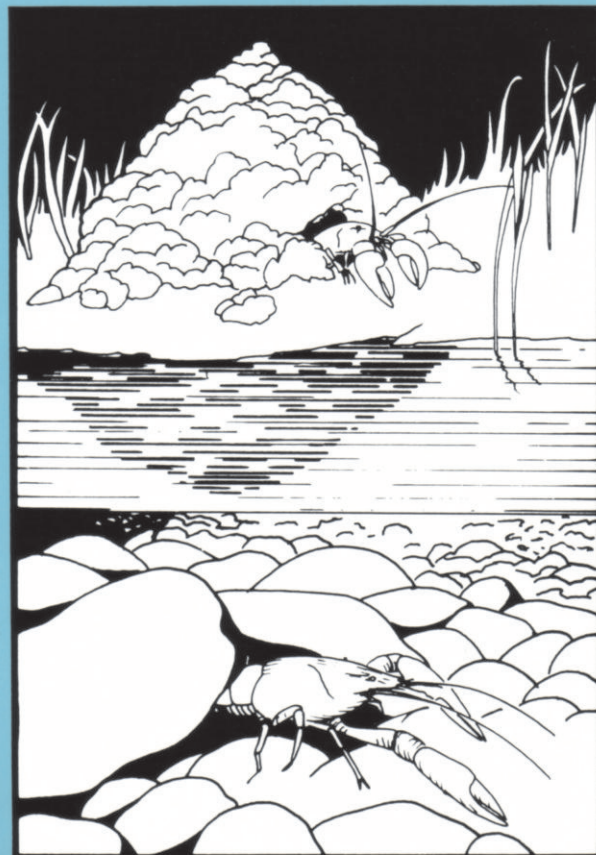


Group Size. This activity can be used with any size group depending on the size of the fishing site. We suggest one adult for every twelve youngsters.

Time. Plan on forty to sixty minutes for this activity. However, more time will allow for more experimentation with baits and fishing techniques.

Site. For crawdads, choose a site about 50 meters long with gently sloping banks and plenty of elbow room. Avoid deep, swiftly flowing streams or rivers. The best sites usually have snags, rocks, or tree roots for crawdads to hide in or among. For crabs, the quiet side of a breakwater, a low pier or dock, or a rocky shoreline are good sites. Use the fishing technique described in the "Action" section to make sure the site contains crawdads or crabs before taking your group fishing.

Safety. When working around the water, use the buddy system. (See the "Safety" section of the *Leader's Survival Kit* folio.)

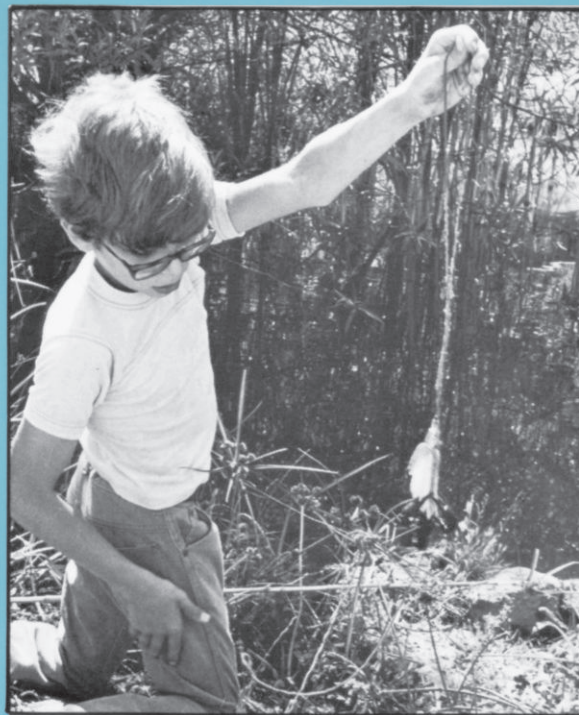


Handling Crawdads or Crabs. To pick up a crawdad or crab, reach from the rear and grab the top of the back (carapace) just behind the claws.

Eating Your Catch. If your group has gastronomic designs, first check your local fish and game regulations to be sure catching the crawdads or crabs is allowed, and then consult a local gourmet for recipes. If you don't plan to eat the crawdads or crabs, be sure to tell the youngsters to release them in the water.

ACTION

1. Announce to your youngsters that they have gathered at the site to hold the First Annual Crawdad (Crab) Grab! Point out boundaries for the fishing site.
2. Explain that the Crawdad Grab is a fishing contest to see which baits and fishing techniques work best.
3. Demonstrate how to set up a fishing rig.
 - Securely tie a piece of string or fishing line to a fishing pole, and tie an alligator clip to the other end of the line.
 - Select a piece of bait, and securely clamp it with the alligator clip.
4. Tell the kids that to catch a crawdad, they will drop or toss the bait into the water and let it sink to the bottom among rocks or tree roots. When they see or feel a crawdad grab the bait, they should bring the bait and crawdad slowly to the surface, and then use a net to scoop up the crawdad while it is still hanging onto the bait. Explain that if the youngsters try to lift the crawdad out of the water without using the net, the crawdad will usually let go of the bait and escape. (Use this same technique for catching crabs.)



5. Divide the group into teams of two and explain the buddy system.
6. Give each team a net and crawdad container. Mention that captured crawdads (or crabs) should be kept in water and out of direct sunlight. Tell the youngsters to place captured crayfish in buckets or dishpans about half full of water. To keep the crawdads cool, the youngsters should periodically replace the water in the container with fresh water every ten to fifteen minutes. They can also keep the crawdads alive by placing them in a burlap bag and hanging the bag in the water. Suggest to the teams that they should try a new bait every ten minutes or so until they find a bait that works really well.
7. Spread out the fishing materials and let the kids set up their fishing rigs with line and bait.
8. When all the teams are ready, signal the start of the contest. While keeping an eye on the teams, try your own luck at catching crawdads.
9. About ten minutes before you want the activity to end, call all the teams together to show off their catches.

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CONTEST HIGHLIGHTS



Tally up each team's crawdad total. Ask the team with the most crawdads to describe their fishing techniques, and then use the following questions to initiate a group discussion.

1. Which baits seem to work best?
2. Where were the best fishing spots?
3. Which fishing technique worked best?
4. How do the crawdads (or crabs) react when you try to pick them up?
5. How do crawdads (or crabs) move?
6. How do they react to each other?
7. How do crawdads (or crabs) eat? Where are their mouths?



BRANCHING OUT



1. Find out if crawdads stay in the same area. Use a bottle of brightly colored nail polish to mark captured crawdads. Dry off their backs and apply a small spot of polish. Let the polish dry before putting the crawdads back into the water. Keep track of the number of crawdads that are marked and released. Hold another Crawdad Grab on a different day to see how many of the marked crawdads you can find.

2. Conduct another Crawdad or Crab Grab, but this time make it a contest to see which team can trap the most animals. Supply the raw materials and tools for making live traps (e.g. hardware cloth, netting, aluminum wire, wire coat hangers, twine, wire cutters, tin snips, pliers, scissors, baits, etc.). Challenge the teams to build a live trap that will catch the most animals.

