

```html

# Lesson Plan: Big Cat Safari - A Creative Exploration

## Materials Needed:

- Computer or tablet with internet access
  - Printer
  - Paper (plain and for printing)
  - Crayons, colored pencils, or markers
  - A notebook or journal for writing
  - Modeling clay, small cardboard box, sticks, leaves, or other craft supplies (for building a den)
  - Optional: A large world map or globe
- 

## Learning Objectives:

By the end of this three-hour lesson, the student will be able to:

- Identify the key characteristics and habitats of six distinct cat species: lions, tigers, cougars, cheetahs, panthers, and bobcats.
  - Analyze how a cat's physical traits (e.g., spots, speed, size) are adaptations for survival in its environment.
  - Creatively apply learned information through drawing, writing, and design challenges.
  - Compare and contrast the social behaviors and hunting styles of different cats.
- 

## Lesson Structure

### Part 1: Introduction - What Makes a Cat "Big"? (15 minutes)

1. **Opening Discussion:** Start by asking, "What comes to mind when you hear the term 'big cat'?" and "What do you think all big cats have in common?" Jot down the student's ideas in a notebook.
  2. **Mission Briefing:** Frame the lesson as a creative safari. "Today, you are a world-class wildlife biologist! Your mission is to study six amazing cats. For each one, you'll gather intelligence, answer field questions, and complete a creative mission to show you understand how this animal is unique."
  3. **Watch a Quick Intro Video:** Find a short (2-3 minute) video on YouTube about the difference between roaring cats (like lions and tigers) and purring cats (like cheetahs and cougars). A good search term is "panthera vs felis."
- 

### Part 2: The Safari Stations (30 minutes per cat)

---

### Station 1: The Lion - King of the Savanna

- **Gather Intelligence (10 mins):** Read a fact sheet or watch a short documentary video about lions (e.g., from National Geographic Kids). Focus on their habitat (African savanna), diet, social structure (prides), and unique features (manes on males). Point out their location on the world map.
- **Field Biologist's Review Questions (10 mins):**
  1. Why is living in a group (a pride) a good strategy for lions?
  2. What is the purpose of a male lion's mane?
  3. How is a lion's tan color an advantage in the grassy savanna?
  4. Describe the role of lionesses in the pride.
  5. If a lion can't run as fast as a cheetah, how does it successfully catch its prey?
- **Creative Mission: Design a Pride (10 mins):** In your notebook, invent your own lion pride. Give it a name, decide how many males, females, and cubs are in it, and draw its special symbol or territory flag.
- **Specimen Sketch:** Provide a lion coloring sheet to complete.

### Station 2: The Tiger - The Striped Hunter

- **Gather Intelligence (10 mins):** Read a fact sheet or watch a video about tigers. Focus on their habitat (Asian jungles and grasslands), solitary nature, and unique features (stripes for camouflage, swimming ability). Find their habitat on the world map.
- **Field Biologist's Review Questions (10 mins):**
  1. How do a tiger's stripes help it hunt in the jungle?
  2. Unlike most cats, tigers are strong swimmers. How might this skill help them survive?
  3. Why do you think tigers hunt alone instead of in groups like lions?
  4. A tiger's roar can be heard from two miles away. What are two reasons a tiger might roar?
  5. What is the biggest threat to tigers in the wild today?
- **Creative Mission: Camouflage Art (10 mins):** On a plain piece of paper, draw a simple jungle background with tall grass and trees. Now, draw a tiger on a separate small piece of paper, color it, cut it out, and see where you can place it in your jungle so it is most hidden.
- **Specimen Sketch:** Provide a tiger coloring sheet to complete.

### Station 3: The Cheetah - The Speed Specialist

- **Gather Intelligence (10 mins):** Read a fact sheet or watch a video about cheetahs. Focus on their incredible speed, unique body shape (long legs, flexible spine), non-retractable claws, and "tear marks" on their face. Locate their habitat on the world map.
- **Field Biologist's Review Questions (10 mins):**
  1. How does a cheetah's flexible spine help it run so fast?
  2. Cheetahs have black "tear marks" running from their eyes down their face. What is the purpose of these marks?
  3. Unlike other cats, a cheetah's claws don't fully retract. How is this similar to the cleats on a soccer player's shoes?
  4. A cheetah's burst of speed lasts for less than a minute. Why can't it run at top speed for a long time?
  5. If a cheetah is built for speed, not power, what kind of prey would it be best suited to hunt?
- **Creative Mission: Invent a Super-Athlete (10 mins):** Design a new animal (or a superhero!) based on the cheetah. Draw it and label three of its body parts that are specifically designed for speed, explaining how they work.
- **Specimen Sketch:** Provide a cheetah coloring sheet to complete.

#### Station 4: The Cougar - The Mountain Ghost

- **Gather Intelligence (10 mins):** Read a fact sheet or watch a video about cougars (also known as pumas or mountain lions). Focus on their wide range of habitats (mountains, forests, deserts of the Americas), powerful hind legs for jumping, and their secretive nature. Locate their vast territory on the world map.
- **Field Biologist's Review Questions (10 mins):**
  1. Cougars are known by many names (puma, mountain lion). Why do you think one animal has so many different names?
  2. Cougars have very large paws and powerful hind legs. What two advantages do these features give them in a rocky, mountainous habitat?
  3. Why are cougars often called "ghost cats"?
  4. A cougar doesn't roar. What kinds of sounds does it make?
  5. Cougars can live in many different environments. What makes them so adaptable?
- **Creative Mission: Map a Territory (10 mins):** In your notebook, draw a map of a mountain or forest. Mark a spot for the cougar's den, a water source (river/lake), and an area where its prey (like deer) might live. Draw the path the cougar might patrol to protect its territory.
- **Specimen Sketch:** Provide a cougar coloring sheet to complete.

#### Station 5: The Panther - The Shadow of the Jungle

- **Gather Intelligence (10 mins):** Explain that a "panther" isn't its own species! It's the name for a black (melanistic) jaguar or leopard. Watch a video about jaguars and leopards, focusing on their powerful jaws, rosette-patterned coats (which are still visible on a black panther), and their stealthy, arboreal (tree-climbing) lifestyle.
- **Field Biologist's Review Questions (10 mins):**
  1. What is a "black panther" really?
  2. A leopard's spots are called rosettes. How does this pattern help it blend into the leafy trees and shadows of its habitat?
  3. Jaguars have the most powerful bite of all big cats. How does this help them hunt unique prey, like caimans or turtles?
  4. Why is being a skilled climber a huge advantage for a leopard or jaguar?
  5. If you looked closely at a black panther in the sunlight, what would you still be able to see on its fur?
- **Creative Mission: Write a Stealth Story (10 mins):** Write a short, three-to-five sentence story from the perspective of a panther hunting at night. Use descriptive words to explain what it sees, hears, and smells as it moves silently through the jungle.
- **Specimen Sketch:** Provide a jaguar or leopard coloring sheet.

#### Station 6: The Bobcat - The Backyard Survivor

- **Gather Intelligence (10 mins):** Read a fact sheet or watch a video about bobcats. Emphasize that this is a smaller wild cat, but still a formidable predator. Focus on its distinctive "bobbed" tail, tufted ears, and incredible adaptability to living near humans. Locate their North American range on a map.
- **Field Biologist's Review Questions (10 mins):**
  1. How did the bobcat get its name?
  2. The tufts of fur on a bobcat's ears serve a special purpose. What do they help the bobcat do?
  3. Bobcats are very adaptable. What does it mean for an animal to be adaptable?
  4. What kinds of smaller animals would a bobcat typically hunt?
  5. Why don't we see bobcats very often, even if they live nearby?

- **Creative Mission: Build a Den (10 mins):** Using craft supplies (a small box, clay, sticks, cotton balls, etc.), build a model of a safe, hidden den where a bobcat could raise its kittens.
  - **Specimen Sketch:** Provide a bobcat coloring sheet.
- 

### **Part 3: Conclusion - Biologist's Final Report (15 minutes)**

1. **Safari Debrief:** Discuss the day's findings. Ask, "Which cat was your favorite, and why?", "Which cat do you think is the most powerful? The most clever? The best survivor?", and "What was the most surprising fact you learned today?"
2. **Final Creative Project:** Announce the final mission: "Create Your Own Super Cat!" On a new sheet of paper, the student must invent a new species of cat. They should:
  - Draw the cat.
  - Give it a name.
  - Combine features from at least three of the cats studied (e.g., the speed of a cheetah, the stripes of a tiger, and the jumping power of a cougar).
  - Write a short description of its habitat, diet, and what makes it unique.
3. **Share and Celebrate:** Have the student present their new super cat, explaining their choices. Celebrate the completion of their safari mission!

^^^