

Operation: Chicken Bodyguard - Keeping Your Flock Happy and Safe

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, learners will become "Chicken Bodyguards." They will learn the essential requirements for keeping chickens healthy and develop the skills to secure a coop against predators from the ground and the sky.

Learning Objectives

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

- Identify the three core pillars of chicken health: Clean water, nutritious food, and safety.
- Explain the difference between "chicken wire" and "hardware cloth" and why one is better for security.
- Identify at least three common predators and describe how they might try to enter a coop.
- Perform a "Security Audit" on a real or model chicken coop to find and fix potential entry points.

Materials Needed

- Access to a chicken coop (or detailed photos/videos of one)
- A measuring tape
- A small flashlight
- Samples of "Chicken Wire" vs. "Hardware Cloth" (or pictures of both)
- A notebook and pencil for the "Security Audit"
- Clean water and chicken feed

1. The Hook: Mission Briefing

Scenario: "Congratulations! You have just been hired as the Head of Security for the Feathered VIPs (Very Important Poultry). Your clients are small, delicious to predators, and not very good at defending themselves. Their lives depend on your ability to create a 'Fortress of Feathers.' Are you ready to accept the mission?"

2. The Three Pillars of Happy Hens (I Do)

To keep our VIPs healthy, we need to manage the three most important things every day:

- **The Fuel (Food):** Chickens need high-quality "layer crumbles" or "pellets." They also love treats like mealworms or greens, but 90% of their diet should be their proper feed. *Rule: Keep feed in a metal container with a lid to stop mice from joining the party!*
- **The Hydration (Water):** Chickens drink a lot! Their water must be fresh and clear. If you

wouldn't drink it because it's slimy or dirty, they shouldn't drink it either. Scrub the waterer once a week to prevent germs.

- **The Fortress (Security):** A healthy chicken is a living chicken. We must protect them from "The Sneaks" (Raccoons/Foxes) and "The Snatchers" (Hawks/Owls).

3. Ground & Sky Defense Strategies (We Do)

Let's look at how predators think so we can outsmart them.

Ground Defense (The Diggers and Grabbing Hands)

Raccoons have hands like humans and can turn latches! Foxes and dogs can dig under fences.

- **The Hardware Cloth Secret:** Chicken wire is actually for keeping chickens *in*, not keeping predators *out*. Predators can rip right through it. We use 1/2 inch "Hardware Cloth" (welded wire mesh) because it is much stronger.
- **The "Anti-Dig" Skirt:** We bury hardware cloth 12 inches into the ground or lay it flat on the grass around the coop so predators can't dig under the walls.

Sky Defense (The Dive-Bombers)

Hawks and owls can see a chicken from high up and dive down at 150 miles per hour.

- **The Roof or Netting:** The chicken run must have a solid roof or heavy-duty bird netting. If you can see the sky through a big hole, a hawk can see your chicken!

4. The Security Audit (You Do)

Now it is time for your field mission. Take your notebook and flashlight to the coop.

1. **The "Pinky Finger" Test:** Walk around the coop. Can you fit your pinky finger through any holes in the wire? If yes, a weasel can get in. Mark those spots down.
2. **The Latch Check:** Does the door have a simple "sliding bolt"? A raccoon can open that. You need a latch that requires two steps (like a carabiner clip) to open.
3. **The Dig Check:** Look at the base of the coop. Is there any evidence of digging? Is the wire buried?
4. **The Sky Scan:** Stand inside the run and look up. Are there gaps in the netting or roofing?

Task: Draw a "Security Map" of the coop and circle three areas that could be made stronger.

5. Success Criteria & Recap

To pass your Bodyguard Training, you must be able to answer "Yes" to these questions:

- Can you explain why we use hardware cloth instead of regular chicken wire? (Answer: Because it's stronger and predators can't rip it).
- Can you name two ways to stop a predator from digging under the coop? (Answer: Burying wire or an "apron/skirt" of wire).
- Did you find at least one way to improve the coop today?

Differentiation & Adaptability

- **For Advanced Learners:** Research the specific predators in your local zip code. Do you have bobcats? Coyotes? Build a specific defense plan for the toughest predator in your area.
- **For Younger Learners:** Use a "Red Light/Green Light" game at the coop. Point to a part of the coop—if it's safe, they shout "Green Light!" If it has a hole or a weak latch, they shout "Red Light!"
- **For Classroom Context:** If no live chickens are available, use a cardboard box to represent a coop and have students "predator-proof" it using craft supplies, explaining their choices.

Assessment

Formative: During the Security Audit, the instructor will observe the student's ability to identify "weak spots" in the coop design.

Summative: The student will present their "Security Map" and explain their top three recommendations for keeping the chickens safe from both ground and air attacks.