



Reptile Rumors

Students will learn about reptile adaptations and behavior through small group discussion and critical thinking. Each group will be given cards, which they must discuss to determine if it is true or false and why. Afterwards, the class will come together to review the correct answers.

How to:

- Break students into groups.
- Designate a location for answers that are true and one for answers that are false.
- Pass out reptile true/false cards around the room.
- Have students discuss each card within their groups for a couple of minutes.
- Have groups decide (or designate) card readers to stand on the side where they believe their card belongs.
- Ask what led each group to decide on true or false, review the correct answers. Correct answers and discussion points are listed below.

1. Reptiles are cold-blooded: TRUE

Reptiles are ectothermic. Their body temperature is the same as the air temperature, so they have to move in and out of the sun to keep their bodies functioning properly. While their blood isn't actually "cold" the idea is on the right track!

2. Snakes are aggressive and will chase you: FALSE

Most snakes are very timid and will try to get away quickly if they see a human. Imagine you were laying on the ground, no arms, no legs, and a giant started screaming and jumping around in front of you. That's what it's like for snakes! They just want to get away. Sometimes, humans may not realize they are between a snake and its safe spot. For example: if you find yourself between a water snake and the shore, he may appear to swim toward you when really, he is just trying to make it to the safety of land.

3. Snapping turtles will bite your toes: FALSE

Snapping turtles do have very strong jaws and long necks, but they aren't interested in your piggy toes! They will avoid humans in the water, we are loud and splash around a lot, that's not something they are interested in. They like to eat fish, frogs and other small animals.

4. Turtles have no feeling in their shell: FALSE

Turtle's spines are fused to their top shell, or carapace, and have nerve endings, so they are able to feel. In the past, people would carve initials into their shells, but this can be very painful for the turtle. While a turtle might not be able to communicate it is in pain like a human, it can still feel it.

5. There are no venomous snakes in Rhode Island: TRUE

There were once timber rattlesnakes in Rhode Island, but they were killed by humans and have not been seen in the state since the 1960's. Copperheads can be found in Connecticut and Massachusetts, but there are no records of them in Rhode Island. Many people have heard the myth that we have cottonmouths (aka water moccasins) in our state, however, this species doesn't occur north of Virginia and couldn't survive in our colder climate.

6. The only good snake is a dead snake: FALSE

This mentality is what caused timber rattlesnakes to disappear from Rhode Island, which left us missing an important part of the ecosystem. Everything in the environment has a special role which is needed to keep the ecosystem in balance. Snakes help control rodent populations, which reduces the risk for disease, including tick born illnesses, like Lyme disease. The only good snake is one that is alive and doing its job in the ecosystem!

7. You can identify a venomous snake by it's vertical (cat-like) pupils: FALSE

This is not a good way to tell apart snakes. First of all, I'm not getting close enough to a snake I can't identify to look into its eyes. Secondly, this isn't accurate, some venomous snakes have round pupils. Finally, all pupils can appear to be round when dilated (in the dark), even in venomous snakes.

8. Many species of non-venomous snakes will imitate venomous snakes: TRUE

Northern watersnakes are often misidentified as cottonmouths because they will flatten their head to make it look triangular, like a venomous snake. Hognose snakes will flare their neck so that they look more like a cobra and black racers will rattle their tails in the leaves to sound like a rattlesnake. Basically, they're all a bunch of posers! The only way to know if it is really a venomous snake is to learn how to identify each species.

9. It is against the law to take a turtle home from the wild to keep as a pet: TRUE

Many species of turtles, such as the northern diamondback terrapin and spotted turtle, have declined due to poaching for the pet trade. It is illegal to take ANY animal from the wild to keep as a pet, they belong in the wild, not in a home. Turtles are difficult to care for, and without the proper diet and habitat, they can suffer greatly.

10. It is okay to help a turtle cross the road: TRUE

If you have an adult with you and it is safe, we encourage people to help turtles cross the road. Fragmentation is one of the greatest threats to turtles, forcing them to cross roads to reach isolated resources. By helping a turtle cross the road, you could be saving an entire population!

11. Snakes don't have bones: FALSE

Snakes, like all reptiles, are vertebrates, which means they have a backbone. In fact, they have a very, very long backbone! Snakes are very flexible due to their many ribs and muscular bodies.

12. It is not okay to release pet reptiles into the wild: TRUE

Releasing a pet that you no longer want into the wild can not be fatal to your pet but could also harm our native wildlife. Letting a pet go could introduce an invasive species to Rhode Island that could take over the resources that our native wildlife needs. It could also introduce new diseases that could affect our native species. NEVER release pets into the wild, find them a new, safe and happy home!

