

## The Galapagos Giant Tortoise activity instructions

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- Put large island maps on each table, ensuring all children have access.
- Study the different islands on the map, look at the size, shape and position of them. Identify features such as volcanoes and Equator. Name the main islands.
- Ask children what they think the environment would be like in terms of vegetation, natural features and which animals may live there. *N.B Note that there are no rivers on the islands, only lagoons during the rainy/garua season.*
- Explain to children that large, central islands, such as Isabela, Santa Cruz and Floreana have 'highlands' in the centre, where rain and mists provide sufficient water to allow trees, plants, ferns and mosses to grow in abundance. Show them photos.
- Suggest that generally, more northern, smaller islands, such as Pinta, Bartolomé and Genovesa are much drier and do not have a rich, green landscape. What plants do they think may grow in such places? Liken to an arid desert environment where cacti and cactus trees are predominant.
- Ask for a volunteer tortoise. Put a card collar around their neck, securing it carefully with a large paper clip. Ask them to take the position of a tortoise, i.e. on hands and knees!
- Explain that they are on an island where there is little rainfall and so little ground vegetation. Cactus plants and trees grow higher off the ground.
- Hold a branch up and ask the 'tortoise' to eat it. They will not be able to reach. Suggest that they can push their limbs up, but not stand on their back legs, as animals such as goats can.
- Which part of their body is preventing them reaching the food? The shell at the back of their necks.
- Using this as a prompt, give pairs of children balls of plasticine. Ask them to shape a carapace or shell (not body) of a tortoise that lives on a drier island, where the food source grows higher off the ground, and one that lives on a more central island, where food is accessible at ground level.

- Which part of the shell will be different?
- After a few minutes ask children to hold their tortoise carapaces flat on their hands for us to see. Discuss their results.
- Using the explanation cards, look at the difference in their carapaces and discuss how the tortoises have had to adapt in order to survive in their island environment. Use the terms 'Domed' and 'Saddleback,' to distinguish between species.
- Consider other differences, such as the longer limbs and neck of the Saddleback, and that the shape of the Domed tortoise offers more protection.
- Using their plasticine models and a large map, ask for volunteers to come to the front, and choose an island, or part of an island, that would offer the best environmental conditions for their tortoise. Place it on the map.
- Explain that on each island, tortoises are slightly different than on other islands, and that all tortoises in the Galápagos are endemic, i.e. live there and nowhere else on Earth.

